



The Unfinished Comic Book Project

Erik Hentell

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Introduction

Back around January 2017 I decided to make a short comic book story. This was really just a creative exercise and wasn't meant to be anything grand. As such I planned out a schedule that ran over the course of the year. In this schedule I planned out the story, the writing of the script, the character designs and so forth. The idea was to have something to show by around the end of the year.

Unfortunately, life had its own plans. For one thing, I was generally busy and didn't keep track of time properly. More than that, however, as I finished the script, I realized that it was far longer than I really intended it to be. The character designs weren't coming along as I had hoped, either. I don't have the most realistic drawing style, but I wanted something more traditionally cartoony without dipping into the popular manga style. This took a surprisingly long time for me to figure out.

Eventually I realized that the original comic book idea just wasn't going to come together, so I opted instead for a small document outlining my ideas about storytelling in a visual medium. Even here, however, I managed to shoot myself in the foot. This was mostly due to the fact that I wanted to include a section on visual storytelling, which mandated about 10 pages of artwork. In addition, I wanted to include some character designs. With this in mind I took some vacation leave from work and went about making the artwork.

Sadly, things went a bit slower than expected and I ended up putting in the finishing touches just before going back to work the next day. Altogether I would say that about 15-20% of what was in my mind actually made it to the page. I truly hope someone finds it useful either in making or appreciating visual storytelling. For those that don't enjoy this work, the only thing I can say is that I went through the effort of making this abomination, so there was no reason for me to not inflict it upon you. May God have mercy on your soul.

Erik Hentell, January 2018



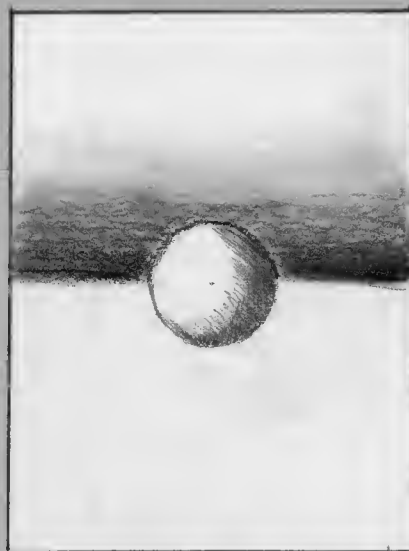
Visual Vocabulary

Comics are a popular form of visual storytelling, but one where the artist tends to be more visually literate in the storytelling tools than the reader.

Effective visual storytelling involves not only creating a pleasing image, but also creating a visual structure that directs the reader's eye through that image. Some artists are formally trained in this and some are self-taught. As a result, just as every visual medium has its own language, every artist in that medium will have a kind of personal dialect.

Often, this language and dialect is not explained to the reader. Because of this, the reader may view the artwork without a deeper understanding of how those images are helping to relate the story. This in turn prevents the artist from creating nuanced images that reveal more of the story than is indicated in the words or actions of the script alone.

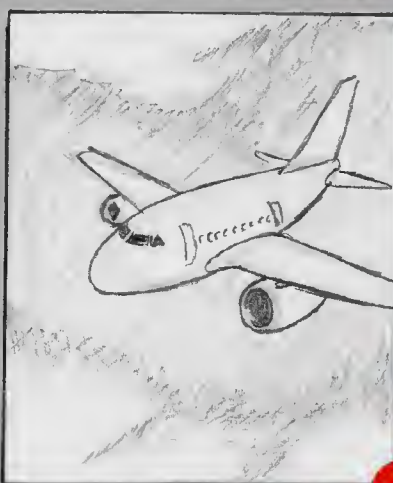
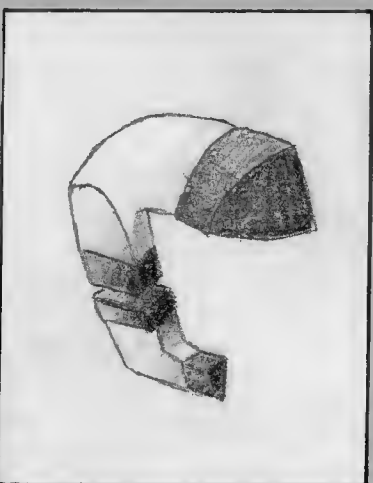
Thus, having an idea of how images can relate information helps both the reader and the artist to create more effective storytelling images. Be aware, however, that these are not hard rules, but general ideas whose meanings are flexible and depend ultimately on the artist. The reader and the artist play a game to determine the story and the following techniques are simply meant to help structure that game.



A



B



C

THE GUTTER

This space between panels can simply act as a general division between the panels or represent travel through time and space.

In **FIGURE A**, for example, the reader appears to approach an object. That is, we're traveling through space over a period of time.

In **FIGURE B**, the reader doesn't move at all, but is stationary, watching a tree grow over time.

In **FIGURE C** the reader sees a set of unrelated images. First a building, then an object, then a plane. Assuming no visual throughline existed, these images would require word bubble, captions, or some other method of showing how they relate to the story.

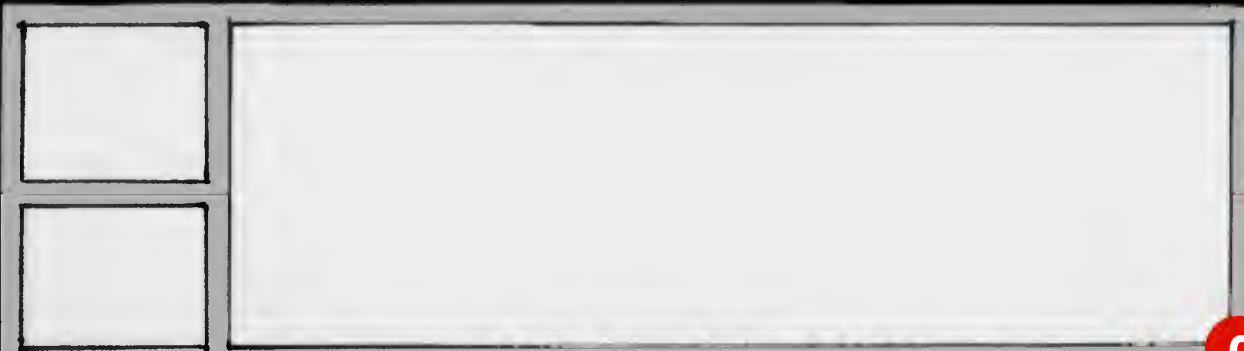
Panels use the gutter to relate to each other in a sequential order (generally speaking). Occasionally, panels will bypass this with some visual element that directs the reader's eye to another specified panel. An example might be as simple as an arrow. This can be used effectively, but it's also a bit of bad form since the sequence of panels follow the path that a reader's eye is used to following in literature. For example, readers of English language literature are used to reading from left to right, top to bottom. Breaking this pattern makes the reader subtly uncomfortable and can upset reading flow.



A



B



C



D

THE PANEL

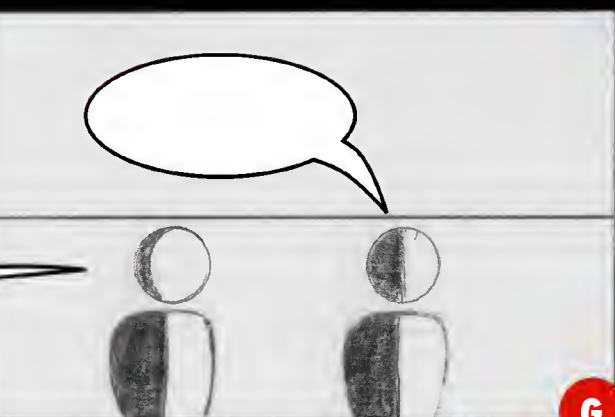
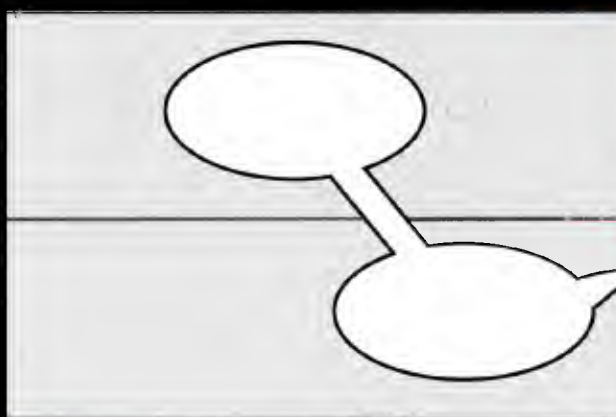
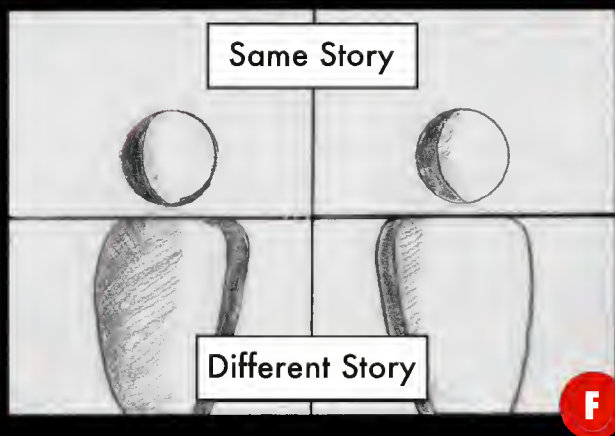
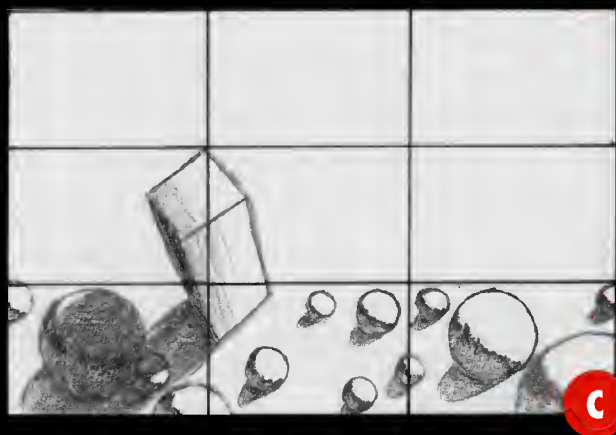
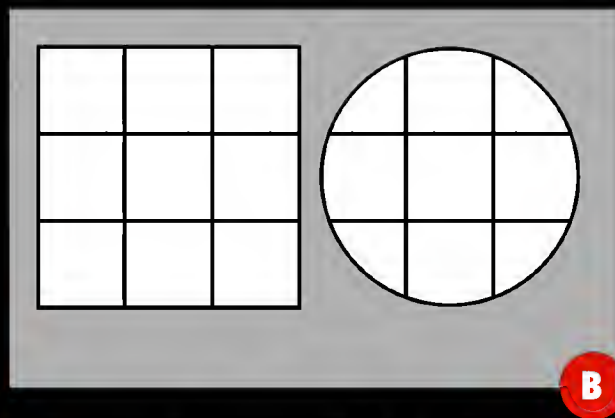
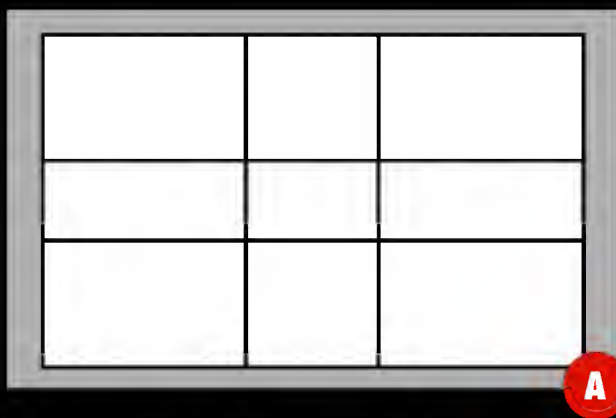
The panel is a window into the world of the story, much like a screen in a video game. How each panel relates to the other can be very important.

In **FIGURE A**, the panels are the same size and shape. This evokes a feeling of regularity and consistency. Early comics had a generally standard layout of 6 panels per page. This allowed a fairly regular flow of moments in the story, but might seem a little too even in the style of today's comics. Conversely, some comics may have such erratically-shaped panels that it becomes difficult to discern what order to view them in. In effect there needs to be a balance between stylization and general readability.

In **FIGURE B**, the panels differ in size and shape. When this happens, it is important to consider why the artist decided to do this and what the relationship of each panel is to the other. Furthermore, a change in size and shape to the panel may indicate a change in the reality portrayed in the panel. The reader should ask if a character's perspective has changed, or if the artist is trying to indicate some kind of subtext using the panels themselves rather than the art within them.

In **FIGURE C**, one panel is clearly larger than the others. A panel that dominates others with size suggests that it carries the dominant idea or moment. The smaller panels are meant to represent complementary, supporting, or lesser ideas in relation to the larger panel.

In **FIGURE D**, one panel contains smaller panels. This would be similar to a quick cut or reaction shot in a movie. The larger panel represents the main idea, while the contained smaller panels are a quick alternate representation of the larger panel. A clichéd example would be if there was a big reveal in the story and the characters each had their own reaction panel. The smaller panels are not independent ideas; they should be considered in the context of the panel that contains them.



DIVIDING THE PANEL

Every panel is subdivided to give structure to an image. This allows a artist to control the reader's eye and suggest relationships in the moment the panel is displaying.

One of two related techniques for dividing a panel are demonstrated in **FIGURE A**. The shape of the panel and the lines shown within it represent the Golden Ratio. The Golden Ratio is thought to be popular in art and film because the shape of the rectangle loosely matches the area that a pair of human eyes can see at once. The lines within the rectangle seem to loosely correlate to how we focus in on a particular subject.

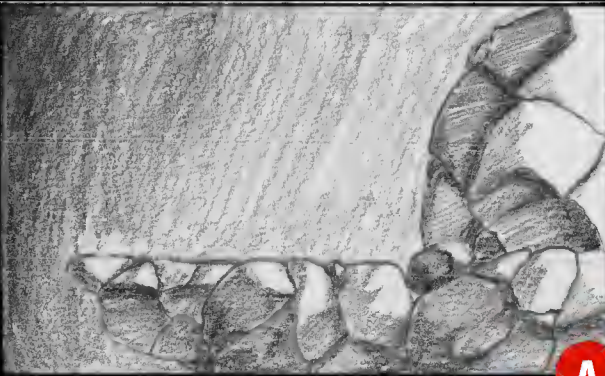
One thing to note, however, is that in art and in film, the rectangle never changes. This is different in comics where a panel can be wildly different in shape than the previous panel or the next panel. This can be shown in **FIGURE B**. In this case, a better technique is the Rule of Thirds, which splits a panel into three equal divisions.

Regardless of which technique is used, the primary spots for the reader to focus on are the points where the lines intersect. The remainder of the lines act as scaffolding to build the scene around those focal points. This is illustrated in **FIGURE C** and **FIGURE D**.

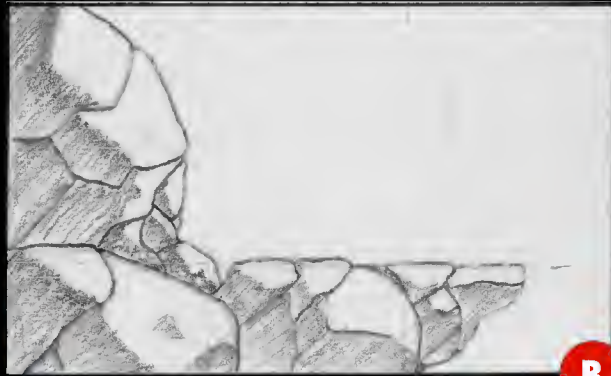
A third technique is the use of Quadrants. This is where the panel is split evenly into four divisions, which can be seen in **FIGURE E**. This technique is useful for creating images that can layer meaning based on which half or quarter of the image the reader is looking at. **FIGURE F** is an example of this.

In **FIGURE G** we see another use. Word bubbles and captions are graphic elements in a panel, but the reader is supposed to pretend they aren't there. Putting most of the panel action in three quadrants and leaving the words in their own quadrant helps keep the reader from being distracted from the important parts of the image.

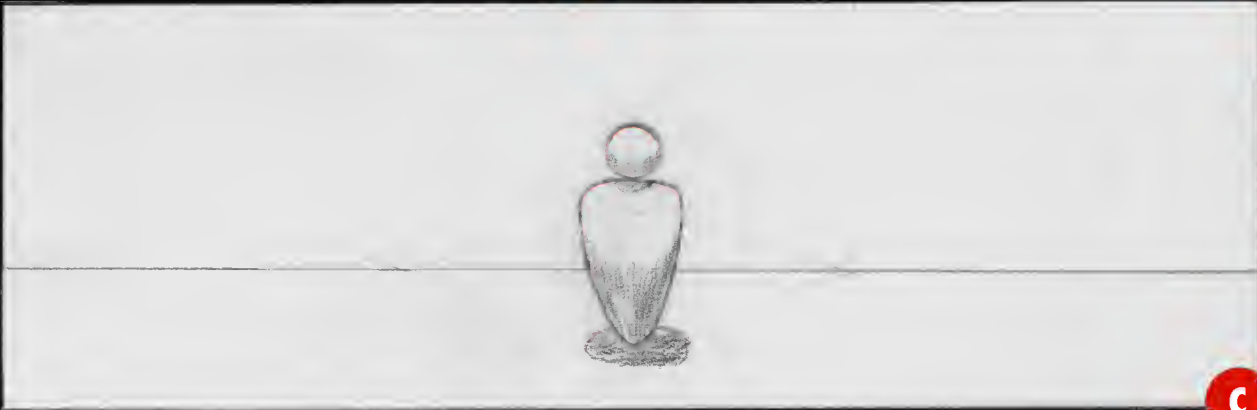
These divisions can be combined with each other. The major importance is to provide a structure to guide the reader's eye and highlight important parts of the image for the sake of the story.



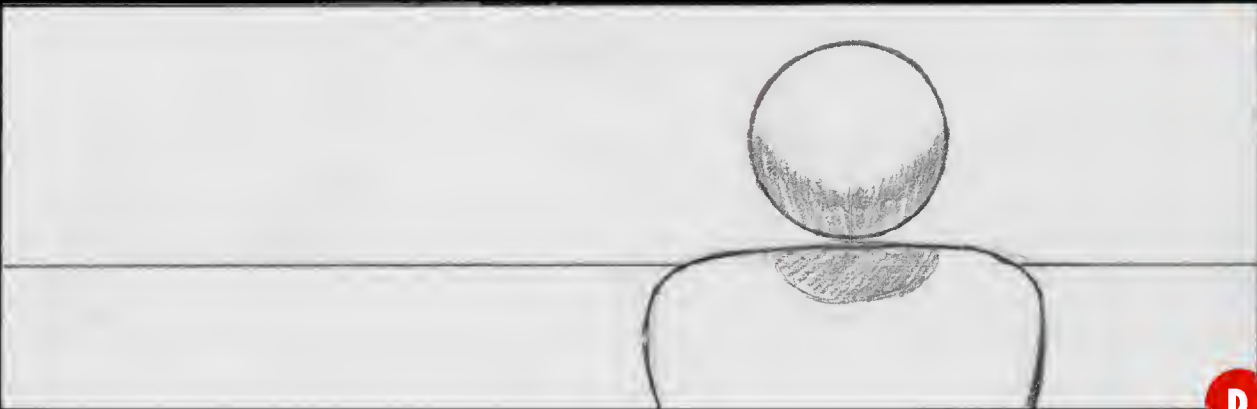
A



B



C



D



E

POSITIONING MAJOR ELEMENTS (I)

The position of a character or object in a panel can reveal the way a reader should think about the what is being seen. As odd as it may sound, there have been studies that indicate that humans (and possibly other species) are hardwired to experience the world in a particular way in particular instances. For those who are interested, check out the "Which Way Did He Go?" YouTube link at the end of this chapter. In addition, look up Roger Ebert's "rules" of film where the late critic discussed certain visual layouts that appeared in film consistently, albeit perhaps not entirely consciously.

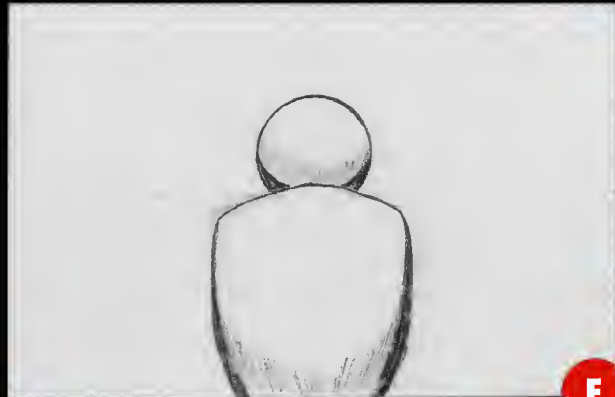
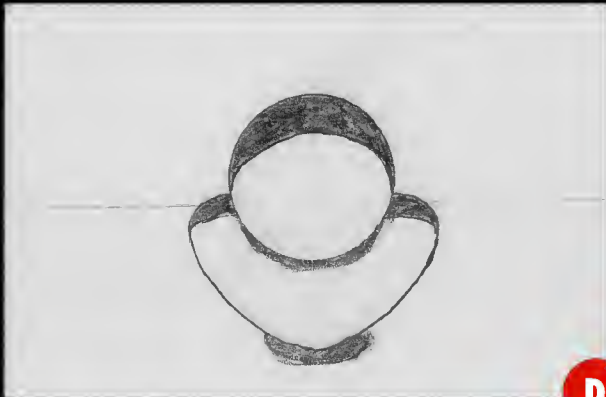
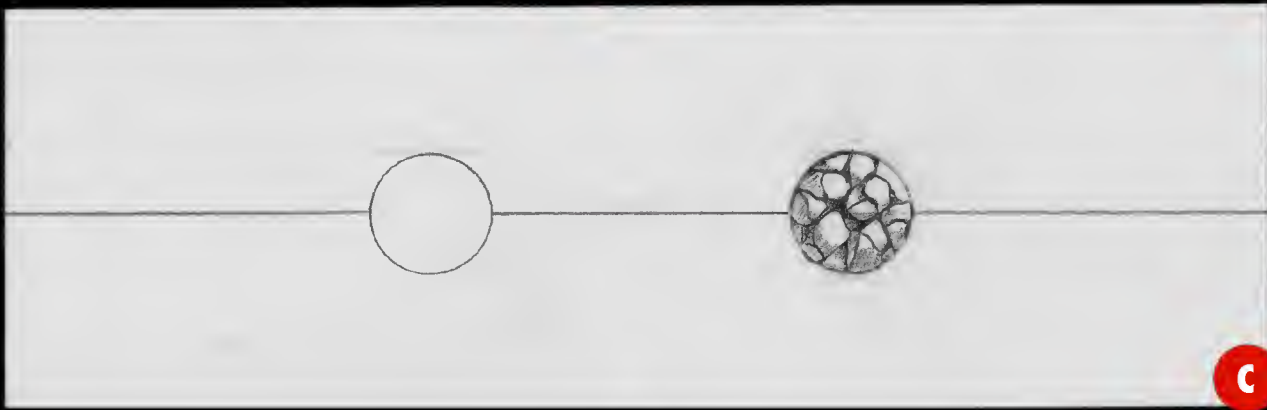
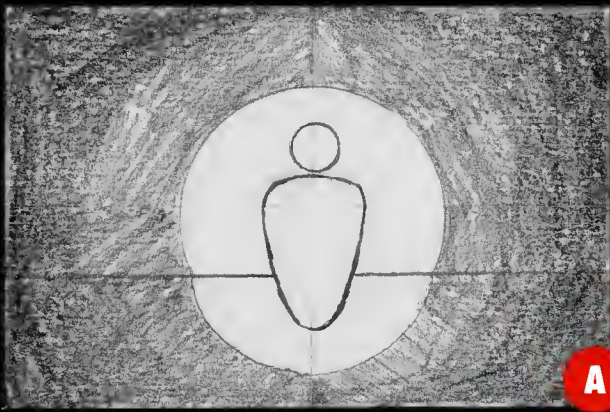
To start with, anything that is placed on the left side of the panel, directs the reader's eye to the left side or generally provides a feeling of motion or focus to the left side is emotionally negative or looking towards the past. This can be seen in **FIGURE A**.

Anything similar on the right side of the panel can be seen as emotionally positive or looking towards the future. This can be seen in **FIGURE B**.

Anything placed in the center of a panel is meant to command the reader's attention. Generally, the area of the panel surrounding the center object is meant to take a supporting role, directing the reader's eye to the center object. **FIGURE C** is an example of this.

Size is an indicator of power or attention relationships in a panel. Objects that are very large or closer to the reader simply command more attention. This can be seen in **FIGURE D**. This can be because the artist is trying to declare the object superior in some way, or perhaps the artist just wants the reader to take a particular notice of the object as a setup for later in the story.

Objects that are far away or smaller are considered inferior in some way because they are more easily missed. An example would be **FIGURE E**. This might be a deliberate trick by the artist. Sometimes it is useful to hide important information in plain sight by making it appear less important to the eye. This is why it's important for the reader to scan through an image rather than just looking at it and moving on to the next panel. Storytelling means setup and an insignificant object in one panel might in fact mean something very significant later in the story.



POSITIONING MAJOR ELEMENTS (II)

In addition, light plays a role. Objects that are placed in light are brighter and might be used by the artist to highlight some element, as in **FIGURE A**, or place some kind of value on it. This highlighting or value-placing can mean anything from holy purity to general importance. Shadows can be useful as an inverse technique. Objects in shadow could be hidden, part of the generic background, mysterious and so forth. An example can be seen in **FIGURE B**.

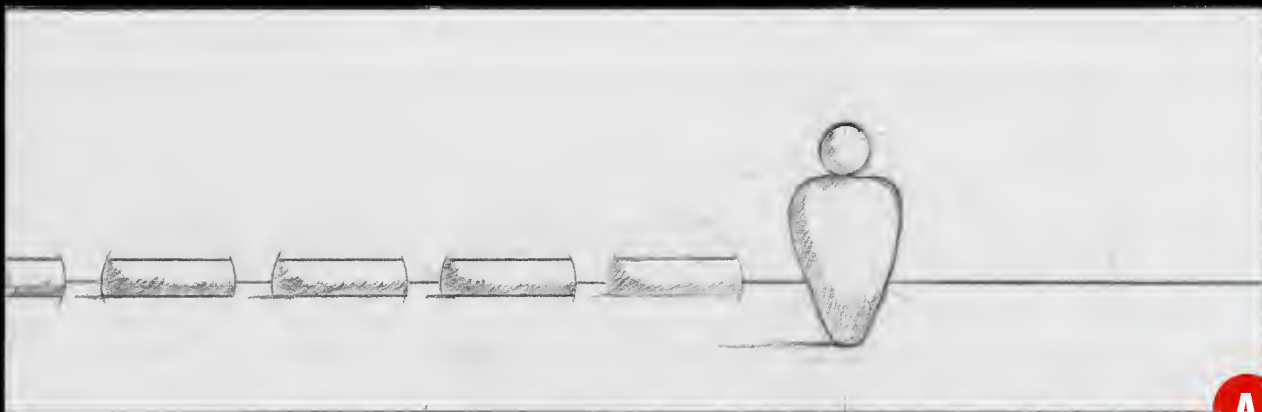
Detail is another technique. The reader's eye will tend towards anything with more detail. Generally, objects in the foreground receive more detail than objects in the background. This allows the artist to control what the reader is looking at in a panel, as in **FIGURE C**. In this case, both objects can be said to be in the foreground, but one is more interesting to look at and therefore will take up more of the reader's focus. If the entire panel is full of detail, there is a risk of the reader's eye getting lost. There has to be some kind of throughline.

The angle with which the reader is viewing the images is also important. Looking down on an object, as in **FIGURE D**, suggests that the object is less powerful. This doesn't have to be as extreme as in the figure. One can imagine an interrogation scene where the subject of the interrogation is seen from this angle, but in much more subtle way.

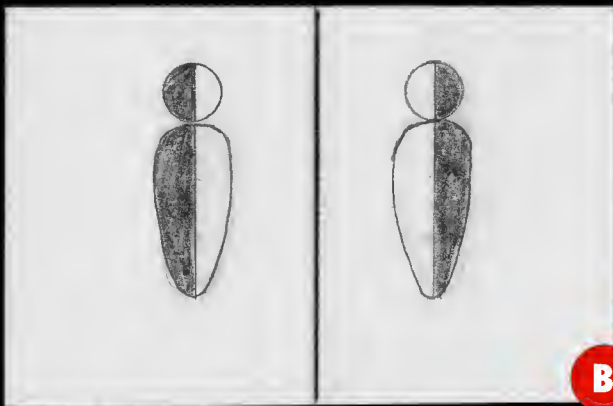
Looking up at an object, as in **FIGURE E**, suggests an object is more powerful. Going back to the interrogation scene example, a standing interrogator might be seen this way. Of course, characters aren't the only type of objects that need to be shown this way. There are plenty of pictures of buildings shot at this angle to emphasize their impressiveness.

Finally, exposure to the reader is also important. When an object or character is facing the reader, as in **FIGURE F**, important information is exposed about the state of whatever the reader is looking at. The reader is able to construct a narrative about what is being seen.

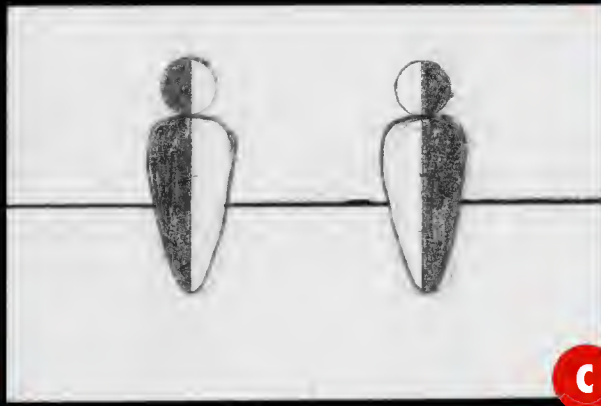
FIGURE G illustrates something very different. In this case, the object is facing away from the reader, which means that the reader is aware of the object, but can't discern information about the object. This creates a mystery; why has the artist made the object available to view, but not allowed the reader to gain information about it? Naturally, this is very context-dependent on the story itself.



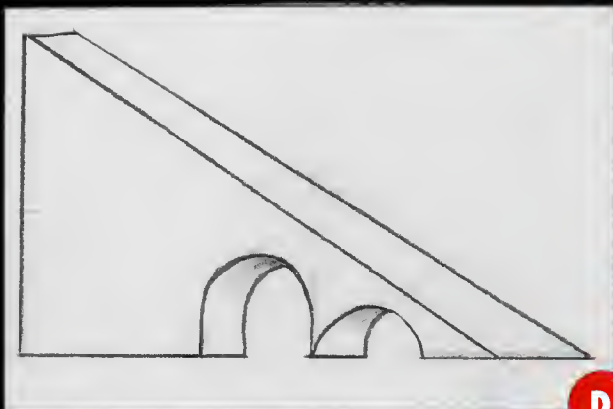
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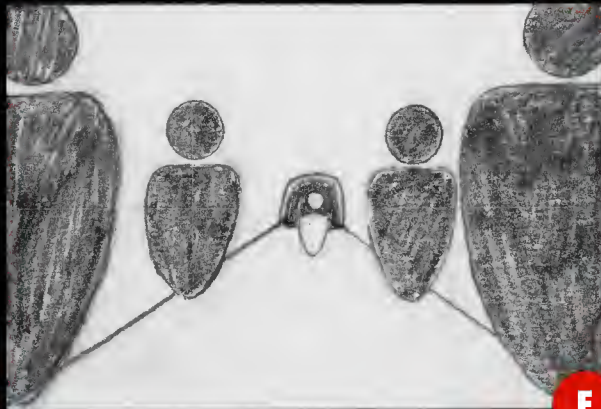
B



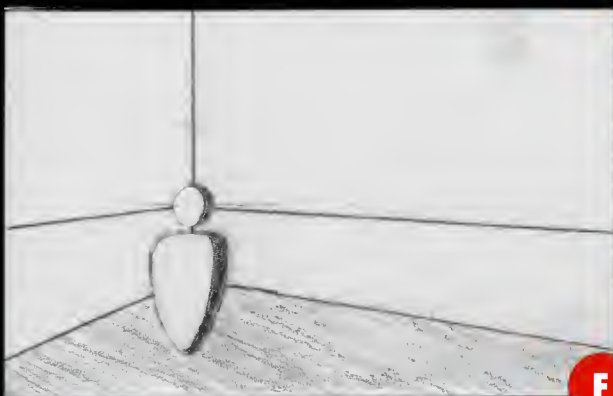
C



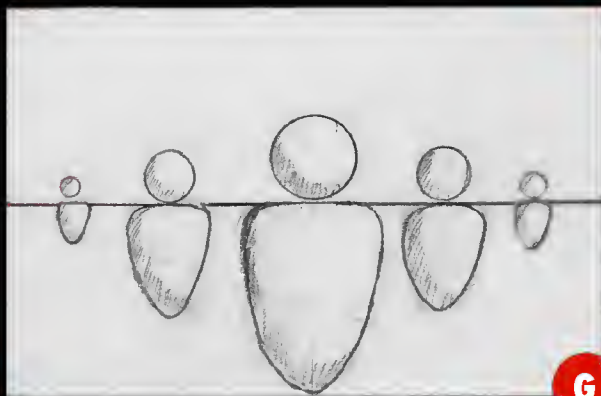
D



E



F



G

GEOMETRIC COMPOSITION (I)

The use of basic geometric shapes can control the reader's eye or demonstrate power relationships between characters. This is basically the use of lines, boxes and circles to organize elements of an image.

In **FIGURE A**, the reader's eye would be controlled by the use of lines. In this case a row of objects, that would naturally lead the reader's eye to the most important object in the frame. Lines can also be used to divide. Again, looking at the figure, we see a horizontal line division, possibly indicating a "floor" and some kind of background.

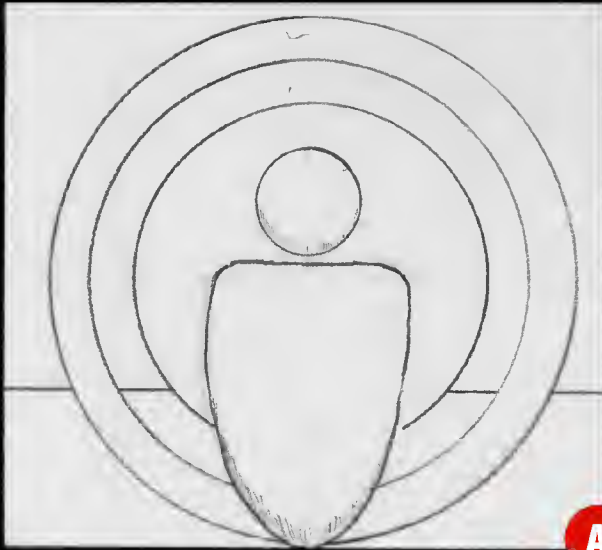
In **FIGURE B**, we see that two objects are facing each other with a vertical line being formed in the background. This should imply to the reader an emotional division between the two objects. In an actual comic book, this might be a tree, or a lamp post. Sometimes it can be something subtle like a difference in color. In any case, the fact that two characters are facing each other with something in the way indicates a desire to connect and some kind of resistance to that connection.

In a similar manner, **FIGURE C** has two objects facing each other. This time, however, there is a horizontal line in the background. The horizontal line provides a natural bridge for the reader's eye to travel from one object to the next. This creates an emotional connection between two objects. The exact nature of the connection depends on the story. It could be anything from love at first sight to a standoff just before the final battle in an action story.

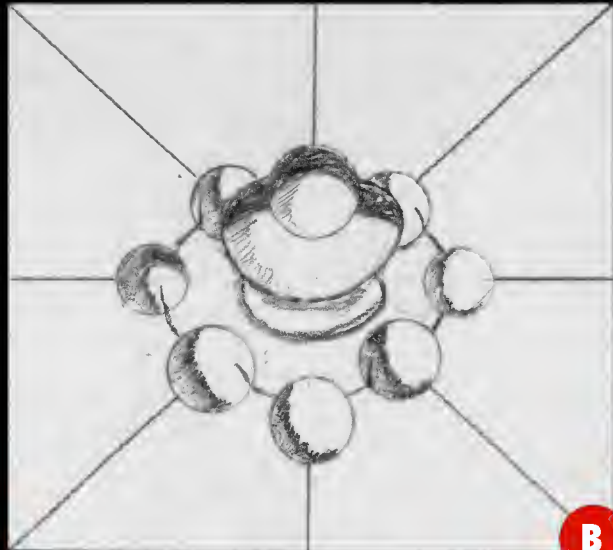
Triangles are more dynamic than basic lines in controlling the eye. This is inherent in their shape. In **FIGURE D**, for example, there is only one object in the panel. Despite this, because of the nature of the triangle, the eye is controlled in different ways. The leftmost edge of the triangle blocks the reader's eye from going to the left, leaving it nowhere to go up or down. If the eye goes up, it "slides" down the long edge of the triangle, but there's nowhere to go after that, so the eye moves along the bottom edge back to the leftmost edge. The cycle then repeats.

In **FIGURE E**, note the layered vocabulary. The object in the center naturally catches the eye, but is very small. Despite this the object is implicitly important because the ground forms a triangle toward it. The other objects also form a triangle facing towards the central object and away from the reader. Finally, the central object is framed, which will be discussed in the next section.

Finally, the use of the triangle can evoke a sense of empowerment or suppression. In **FIGURE F**, the object is pushed into a corner, the lines of which create an implicit triangle. This is meant to convey a feeling of entrapment. In **FIGURE G**, however, the object appears empowered, pushed forward by an implicit triangle of shapes that point towards the reader.



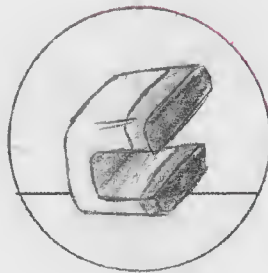
A



B



C



D

GEOMETRIC COMPOSITION (II)

Circles and rectangles can be used like triangles, but are better suited to encapsulating one or more objects.

In **FIGURE A**, a circle placed behind the object creates the feeling of a halo around the object. This might work in part because Western society associates certain ideas towards a figure with a halo. Note, however, that a circle has no sharp corners, so an eye can just travel along its perimeter. This suggests being easy to look at, generally, as well as highlighting whatever the circle is acting as a halo for.

In **FIGURE B**, there is a different use for a circle (or perhaps "oval" would be better here.) In this case, it is acting as a containment device. Several smaller objects surround the main object. Presumably this means that the object is guarded in some way.

Circles and rectangles can also highlight and separate elements of an image, creating emphasis for the reader. In **FIGURE C**, for example, two objects are encapsulated by rectangles. One object is partially visible (by being behind a rectangle) and the other is fully visible (by being in front of a rectangle).

This should create an emotional layout for the reader. The partially visible object is important for the reader to observe, but not necessarily the strongest, emotionally. The fully visible object is also important for the reader to observe. It is also implied that the artist wants the reader to emotionally connect with this object. If it were two characters talking to each other, the implied scenario is that the fully visible character would be the one the reader is supposed to support, while the less-visible character is some kind of counter-balance.

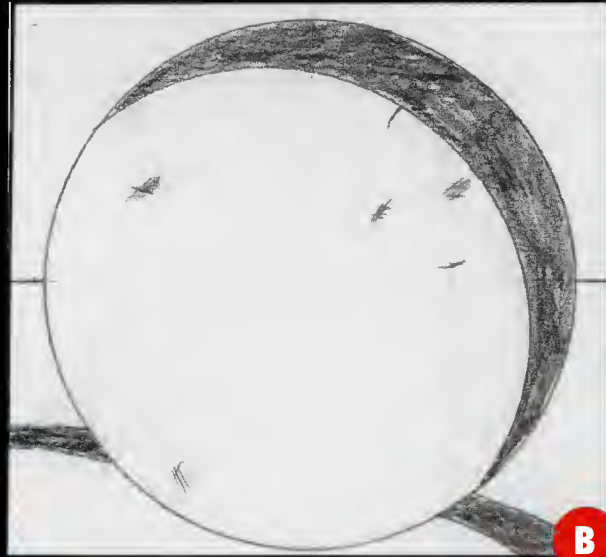
It is also possible to use circles and rectangles to isolate objects in a panel from other related objects. **FIGURE D** shows a panel in which two objects are facing each other, but this time there is a circle in the background encapsulating a third object.

The statement here is that the third object exists in the same reality of the other objects, but is also isolated from them to the point of not being able to interact with them directly. The artist wants the reader to make note of the third object, but also wants to make sure the reader understands that the third object is in an isolated position. The exact reason why depends on the context of the story.

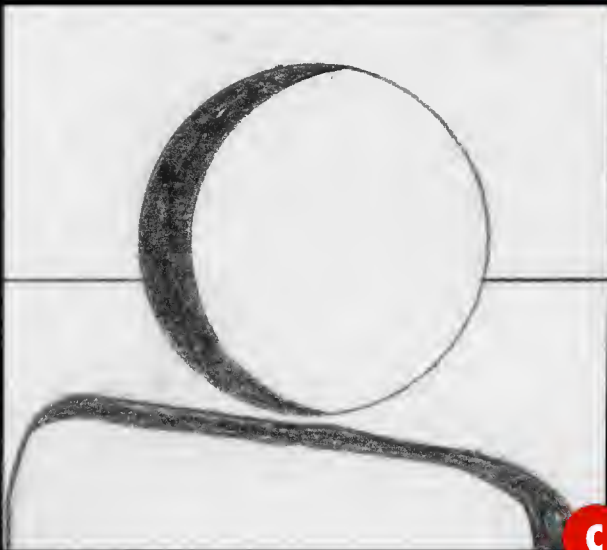
The location of the third, encapsulated object between the other objects suggest it is a point of emotional division. That is, it is creating emotional separation between the other two objects even though it is not capable of interacting directly with them. This is all context-dependent on the story.



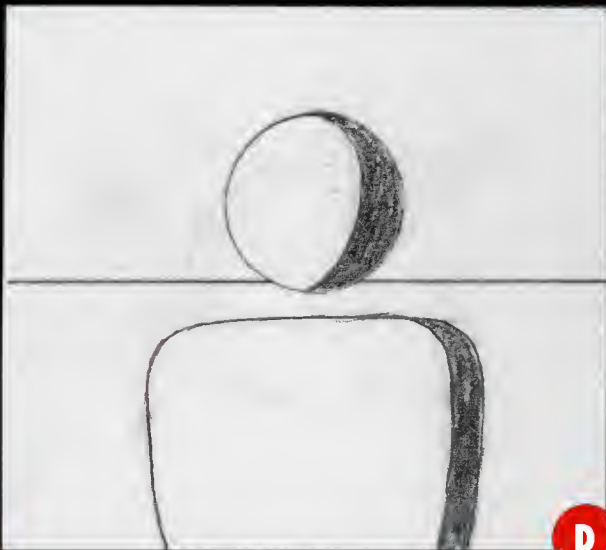
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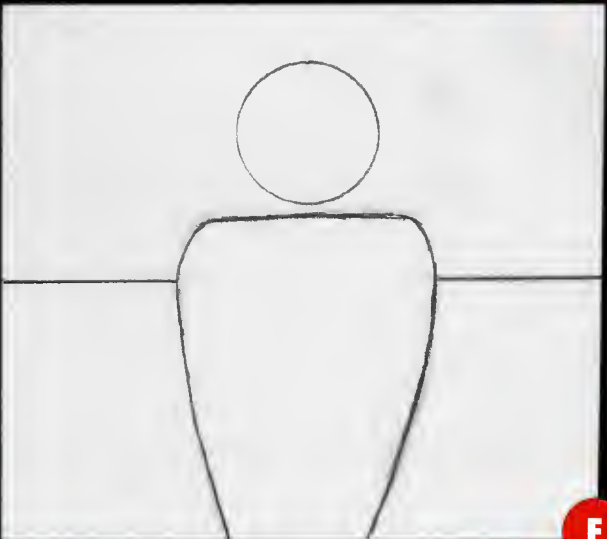
B



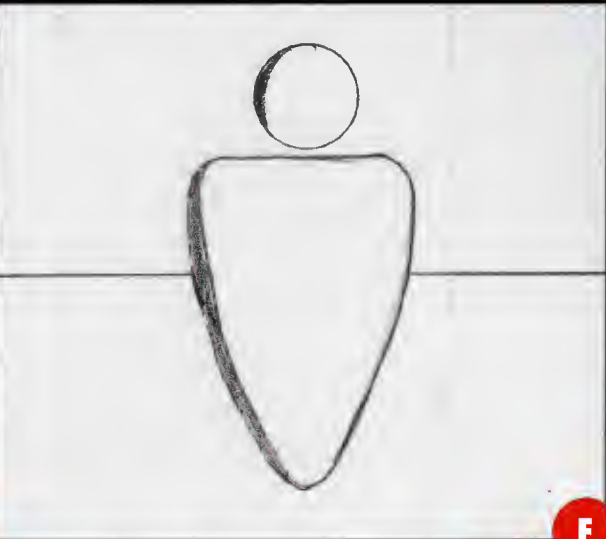
C



D



E



F

CAMERA SHOTS (I)

Camera shots in this case refers to the specific techniques to make the reader think about what is being shown. These techniques have seen their greatest use in film and television, but are also valid in comic books.

The Extreme Close-Up:

This camera shot in **FIGURE A** is meant to draw the reader's attention to very specific and minute details, often in a character, but sometimes in a non-character element as well. There is an implied promise that these details are relevant to the larger story.

The Close-Up:

This camera shot as seen in **FIGURE B** is meant to create a connection between the subject of the shot and the reader by bringing the reader "close" to the subject of the image.

The Medium Close-Up:

This shot is still close to the subject of the image, but also includes a sizeable amount of background as in **FIGURE C**. The purpose of this shot is for the reader to connect with the subject of the image, but also see how the subject is connected to the surrounding area.

The Medium Shot:

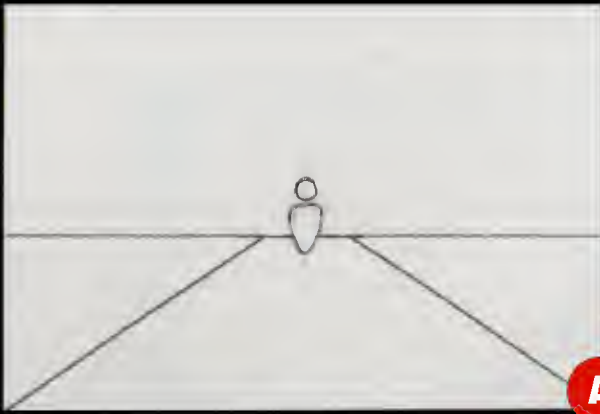
The purpose of the shot in **FIGURE D** is to allow the reader to see the subject of the image within an environment, not just in front of it. This gives the reader the ability to see relationships between the subject and other characters or objects within the frame. The fact that there is nothing else in the panel, for example, would speak to isolation, loneliness, or some other aspect of the story.

The Medium Long Shot:

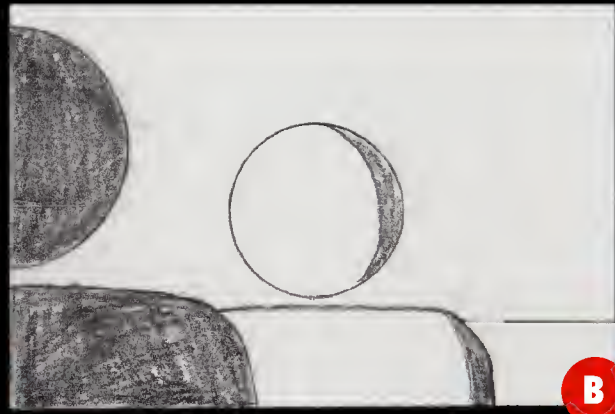
This shot allows the reader to observe a subject from far enough away that there is less emotional attachment. The reader can see how the subject is behaving physically and how the subject exists in relation to a larger environment. **FIGURE E** is an example of this. Unlike previous shots, this camera shot can show power relationships between the subject and the elements in the surrounding environment.

The Long Shot:

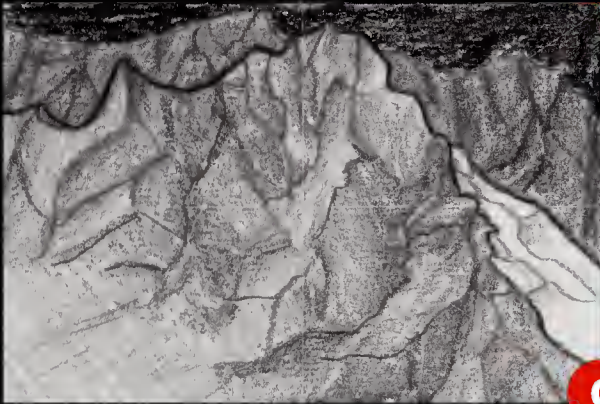
The shot in **FIGURE F** is useful for showing how the environment exerts power over the subject of the image. It also creates more space to demonstrate power dynamics among various characters or object within a frame. Finally, the shot pulls the reader far enough away that the reader can observe without becoming emotionally attached.



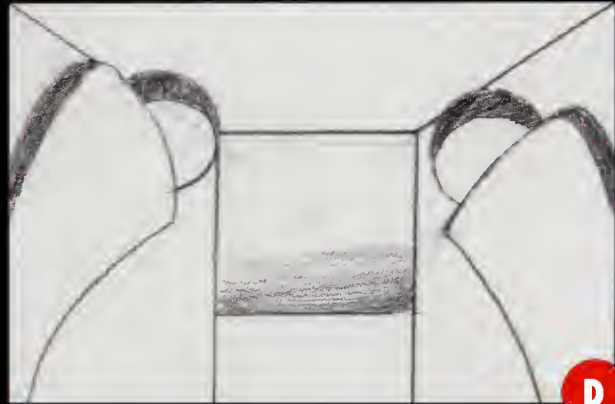
A



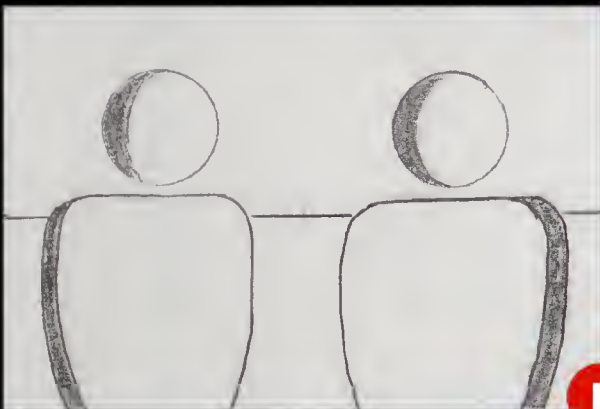
B



C



D



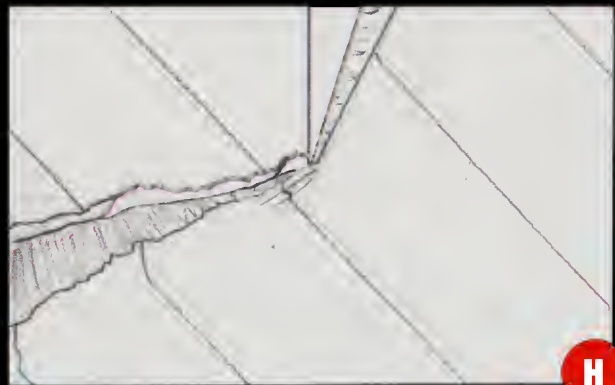
E



F



G



H

CAMERA SHOTS (II)

The Extreme Long Shot:

The purpose of this shot is to demonstrate the vastness of an environment and the miniscule nature of the subject of the frame, if there is a subject beyond the environment at all. This shot is also useful as an establishing shot, letting the reader know the location where the action will take place. **FIGURE A** is an example of this.

The Over The Shoulder Shot:

This shot shows power dynamics between two objects as in **FIGURE B**. One is facing away from the reader and the other towards the reader. This can give cues on how they relate to each other. One character is clearly important to the story but not important to the reader in this panel, while the other character is clearly important, being in the center and visible.

The Establishing Shot:

This shot is all about the location. The reader should be able to understand the nature of the location or even the world and get an idea of how it might relate to the story. The mountain range in **FIGURE C** is an example of this.

The Subjective Shot:

This shot sees the world through the eyes of a character. This allows the reader to experience the world the way the character would experience it as might happen in **FIGURE D**.

The Two Shot:

This shot features exclusively two characters. It allows the reader to observe the relationships and power dynamics between them in isolation from the rest of the story. **FIGURE E** shows two objects that seem similar, but have subtle differences that might speak to a larger context.

The Group Shot:

For the shot in **FIGURE F**, the reader should be able to observe relationships between multiple characters and between the characters and their environment. This shot is meant to highlight some key point or theme regarding the group in one image.

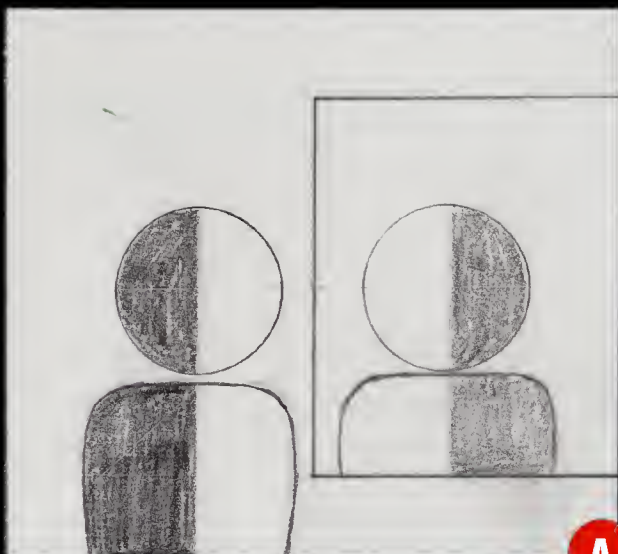
The Canted Shot:

An image that is rendered at an angle. The reader will see this shot when a character is in an altered state of mind or if the image is meant to convey some unusual occurrence, as in **FIGURE G**. The normal flow of reality is disrupted or a character's view of the world has been thrown into disorder.

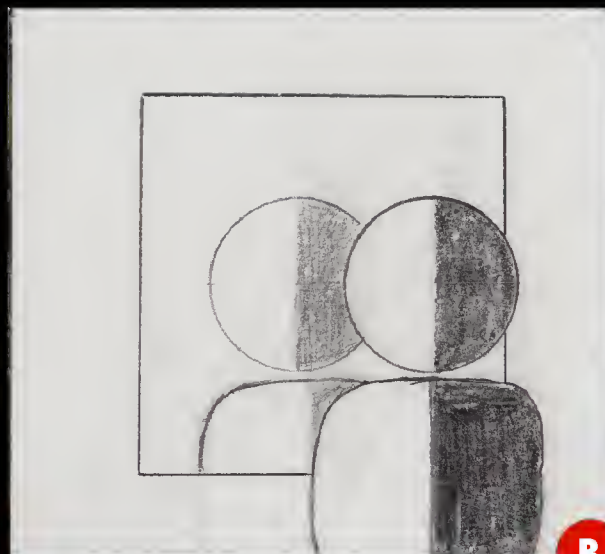
The Macro Shot:

Similar to the Extreme Close-Up, but even more extreme. This shot, shown in **FIGURE H**, focuses on the most minute details of a character or object. In this case, an X-Acto knife cutting some paper. The point is to make the mundane interesting via extreme perspectives.

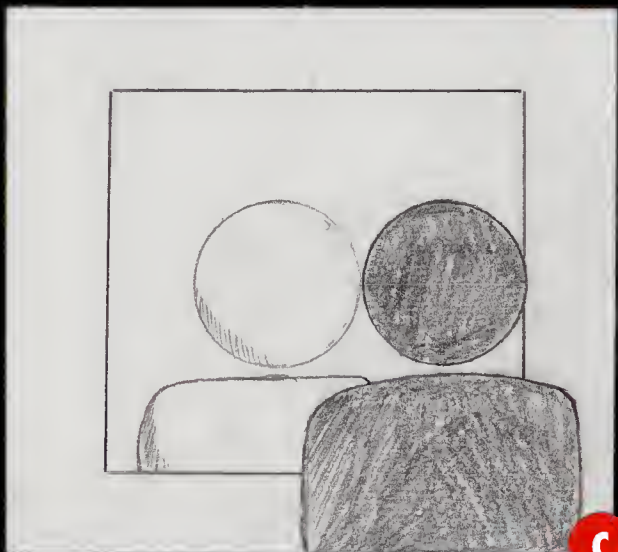
The reader can expect that what is being shown is important to the story and that this importance will be shown in a later part of the story. Think of it as a close-up on an almost microscopic level, but with a meaning based on the context of some future part of the story.



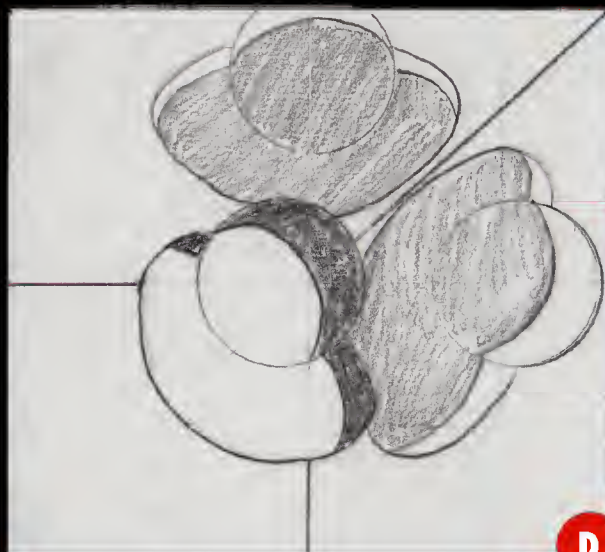
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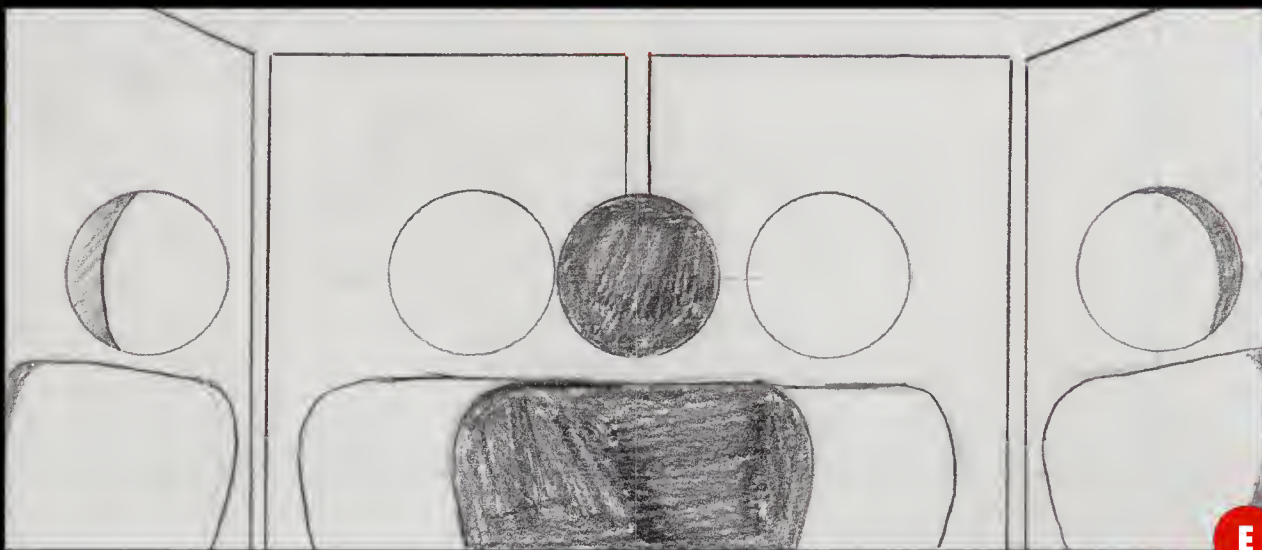
B



C



D



E

REFLECTIONS

Mirrors can be used to reflect the nature or mental state of a character in order to progress a story. In some cases, the meaning of a reflection is specific, in other cases vague and depending on context.

In **FIGURE A** a character with a reflection facing in the opposite direction. This can indicate that the character is not telling the truth or is engaging in some form of duplicity.

The character in **FIGURE B** is shown with a reflection facing in the same direction. This can indicate that the character is "of two minds". That is, the character is unsure, lacking in confidence, or confused on some matter.

In **FIGURE C**, a character is facing away from the reader, but the reflection is facing towards the reader. This can mean many things. The fact that the character is turned away from the reader means the character is "hidden" from the reader. This could mean the reflection is a presentation that the character wants to present to the world, effectively hiding the real self.

This could also mean that the reflection is the character's true nature revealed. This would be especially true if the reflection was warped or the reflective surface damaged. If the character is staring at the reflection, this could be interpreted as a confrontation with the character's inner self.

Multiple reflections can illustrate the situation a character is in. In **FIGURE D** the character has multiple reflections, all of them facing away. This can suggest a sense of isolation, that the world has "turned its back" on the character. The particular angle used also indicates a feeling of being trapped, although this kind of reflection doesn't always need to convey that.

If multiple reflections are facing towards the character, as in **FIGURE E**, then the character may be in a situation of active confrontation. That is, the world is about to gang up on the character or engage in some form of confrontation.

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Many of the ideas in this section were culled from a variety of sources such as books, studies and online commentary. Below is a list of these sources and the information needed for the readers of this publication to evaluate first-hand.

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The Comic Book Script

PAGE 1

PANEL 1 - ESTABLISHING SHOT OF A DENSE FOREST - DAY

The forest is being viewed from the treetops, covering the land and showing green all the way to the horizon. The entire world might as well be one gigantic forest from this viewpoint.

In the center of the frame, far away but visible against the trees is a bird looking into the forest.

PANEL 2 - CLOSEUP OF THE BIRD

It's an owl, but the eyes are a glossy and impenetrable black. It appears to be looking for something.

PANEL 3 - AS ABOVE

Something off frame left catches the owl's attention. Its head snaps toward the source quickly.

OWL

!

PANEL 4 - LONG SHOT OF THE OWL

The owl launches off the branch and heads toward an unknown target somewhere in the distance in the direction of frame left.

PAGE 2

PANEL 1 - LONG SHOT OF A FOREST PATH

There are three people walking along the path, but one (Brighello) is much further ahead, walking towards frame left, while the other two (Becka and Maggie) are closer to the right side, walking alongside each other.

Brighello is of average height, but lean. He wears a high-tech suit that allows him to move at extremely high speeds in a straight line. Unlike the others, he didn't build his suit over time, but rather acquired it at some point early in his adventuring career. This allowed him a variety of victories early on. He often operates as advance scout for the team.

Becka wears a powerful exosuit which has something of an ad-hoc appearance. Like many others, she started out with a barely-useful exoskeleton and added parts over time as she gained success in her adventuring. She represents the muscle of the team

Maggie is the sorcerer of the group and wears a flowing outfit that covers everything except her eyes. The clothing is light, but also bound by rune-etched straps. She carries several bags with her and a walking staff. Like Becka, she started out with very little, but acquired her tools and tidbits over time.

MAGGIE

(small text because they are far away)

...I don't know. He was fine before we went into the shop, but then he just came barging out...

BECKA

(small text because they are far away)

Well, he better let us in on it soon. I'm getting tired of walking around with no explanation.

PANEL 2 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

Brighello has a focused look on his face as he looks at a map he's holding in front of him with both hands.

PANEL 3 - TWO SHOT OF BECKA AND MAGGIE

Becka and Maggie are talking to each other, trying to figure out what the situation is.

BECKA

(regular size text)

Do you think there's a hidden village here?

MAGGIE

(regular size text)

I haven't heard of any.

BECKA

Maybe there's a vault or something?

MAGGIE

Out here? Ruins, maybe.

PANEL 4 - AS ABOVE

Off-frame Brighello yells with excitement. Becka and Maggie are both startled by the sudden outburst.

BRIGHELLO

(from off-panel)

YES! IT'S HERE!

PAGE 3

PANEL 1 - MEDIUM CLOSEUP SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

Brighello is excitedly holding up a map and pointing at something hidden off-panel by some bushes.

BRIGHELLO

(yelling text)

BECKA! MAGGIE! I FOUND THE POND! THE MAP WAS
RIGHT!

PANEL 2 - WIDE HIGH SHOT OF THE ENTIRE AREA THAT ENCOMPASSES BRIGHELLO, BECKA AND MAGGIE

Brighello is excitedly pointing to a large pond, slightly hidden by some bushes.

BRIGHELLO

(regular size text)

Well?

PANEL 3 - TWO SHOT OF BECKA AND MAGGIE

Becka is noticeably irritated and Maggie is just confused.

BECKA

What the hell is this?

MAGGIE

Is there treasure in the pond?

PANEL 4 - MEDIUM CLOSE UP SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

Brighello proudly shows them his map, which indicates the pond and some kind of path to some kind of city or settlement.

BRIGHELLO

Even better! This pond is a portal to the city
of Olorea!

PANEL 5 - TWO SHOT OF BECKA AND MAGGIE

Both are confused, although Maggie is the more reserved of the two. Becka is just plain outraged.

BECKA

(yelling text):

OLOREA! Are you nuts? There's no way we're
ranked high enough to go there!

MAGGIE

Becka's right, this seems a little...
adventurous...

PAGE 4

PANEL 1 - MEDIUM CLOSEUP SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

Brighello visibly does not get (or is wilfully ignoring) their concern. He puts the folded map in a pocket, his posture showing his dismissal of their concerns.

BRIGHELLO

We'll be fine! We're ranked plenty high enough to compete, now come on!

PANEL 2 - TWO SHOT OF BECKA AND MAGGIE

As previously described. Both of them think Brighello is nuts

BECKA

This is about Mezatina, isn't it? Did you find out her team was heading there?

MAGGIE

I really hope that's not true. She beat us fairly, you know.

PANEL 3 - TWO SHOT OF BECKA AND MAGGIE

As described above.

BECKA

You know, we told you it wasn't smart for us to compete against her. You should just get over it and not double down on stupid.

PANEL 4 - WIDE SHOT OF ALL THREE LOOKING AT EACH OTHER

Brighello is just staring at them with a blank look on his face.

PANEL 5 - AS ABOVE

Brighello reaches down to the ground. He seems to be looking for something.

BECKA

?

MAGGIE

?

PANEL 6 - AS ABOVE

Brighello hurls a rock he found on the ground, hitting Becka in the head.

SFX

WACK!

BECKA

OW!

PAGE 5

PANEL 1 - MEDIUM SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

Brighello is visibly angry as he points to the pond, yells at Becka and Maggie.

BRIGHELLO

(yelling text)

THERE IS NO REASON WE SHOULD HAVE LOST TO TEAM
RAVENWALD AND WE ARE PLENTY GOOD ENOUGH TO BEAT
THEM!

BRIGHELLO

(yelling text)

NOW I'VE GOTTEN US THIS FAR SO HAVE A LITTLE
GODDAMN FAITH AND JUMP IN THE POND!

PANEL 2 - LONG SHOT OF BRIGHELLO AND THE POND

Brighello jumps into the pond with a big splash.

SFX

SPLOOSH

PANEL 3 - TWO SHOT OF BECKA AND MAGGIE

The two look at each other. Neither one thinks this is a very good idea.

BECKA

...

MAGGIE

...

PANEL 4 - AS ABOVE

Maggie, in a resigned sort of way, waves a staff she has brought with her.

MAGGIE

Well... he's right. We wouldn't be as highly
ranked without him.

BECKA

Let's just get this over with.

BECKA

(small text):

This is so stupid...

PANEL 5 - WIDE SHOT OF BECKA AND MAGGIE IN THE FOREST.

A magic bubble forms around the duo.

PANEL 6 - AS ABOVE.

The bubble levitates into the air towards the pond

PANEL 7 - AS ABOVE.

The bubble lowers into the pond.

PAGE 6

PANEL 1 - WIDE SHOT OF THE FOREST BY WHERE THE TRIO STOOD

Close to the center of the frame there is a distant branch with something perched on it.

PANEL 2 - AS ABOVE.

The something was the owl, which now flies off into the distance.

PAGE 7

PANEL 1 - WIDE SHOT OF THE BRIGHELLO, BECKA AND MAGGIE

Brighello is in the front, swimming with determination as air bubbles slowly leak from his mouth. Behind him is Becka and Maggie in Maggie's bubble, both trailing far behind. The water is much deeper than the pond suggested, and very dark.

PANEL 2 - MEDIUM CLOSEUP SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

Something takes control of Brighello, surprising and jolting him. Air bubbles start spewing out of his mouth.

PANEL 3 - AS ABOVE

Whatever force is taking control of Brighello flips him upside down, causing more air bubbles to spew out of his mouth.

PANEL 4 - LONG SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

Brighello, in surprise and panic, is dragged feet-first towards a distant light. His eyes are wide and panicked, while his mouth is spewing air rapidly.

PANEL 5 - TWO SHOT OF BECKA AND MAGGIE

We see both Becka and Maggie from behind as they watch Brighello get dragged off.

BECKA

Well, it looks like dumbass is going to drown...

MAGGIE

I wish he wasn't so impulsive.

PANEL 6 - WIDE SHOT FROM BEHIND BECKA AND MAGGIE IN THEIR BUBBLE

There's really little choice on Becka and Maggie's part; they follow Brighello as he's dragged off towards the light in the deep dark waters.

PAGE 8

PANEL 1 - CLOSE UP OF BRIGHELLO

Brighello's head bursts above the water line, coughing and spewing

BRIGHELLO

GASP! *HACK* *COUGH*

PANEL 2 - AS ABOVE

Brighello is in the foreground, visibly coughing as Becka and Maggie's bubble burst out of the water in the back ground.

SFX

SPLSHH!

PANEL 3 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF BECKA AND MAGGIE

Becka is wide-eyed and panicking as she looks up, but Maggie is holding her to contain her panic.

BECKA

(yelling text)

WHAT THE SHI-

MAGGIE

Easy, easy..

PANEL 3 - ESTABLISHING SHOT OF THE CITY OF OLOREA

All three are upside-down about shoulder-height above the water line. They think they're looking up, but in reality they're at the top of a massive air bubble in an endless sea of water. In the very distance, at the bottom of the air bubble, visibly tiny because of how far away it is, floats the city of Olorea.

PAGE 9

PANEL 1 - MEDIUM LONG SHOT OF ALL THREE CHARACTERS

Brighell is in the foreground with Becka and Maggie in Maggie's bubble in the background. Becka is yelling furiously at Brighello, who seems to take no notice of her anger. Instead, he's looking at the map and pointing off in a direction.

BECKA

(yelling text)

HEY YOU NUMBSKULL! WHAT DID YOUR GODDAMN MAP SAY ABOUT THIS, HUH? WE'RE ABOUT TO FALL TO OUR DEATHS HERE!

MAGGIE

Calm down, please!

BRIGHELLO:

Maggie, get Becka to shut up. The map says we'll be okay if we don't get too high above the water.

PANEL 2 - WIDE SHOT OF THE THREE CHARACTERS

The three are taken by the water currents down the side of the water's wall to Olorea. Brighello is in the lead with Becka and Maggie following behind.

BRIGHELLO

The water streams will take us straight to the pier.

PANEL 3 - WIDE SHOT OF THE EDGE OF OLOREA PIER

The edge of a pier is just visible in the frame. Off in the distance we can see the trio floating down the water's wall.

PANEL 4 - MEDIUM SHOT OF ALL THREE FROM BEHIND

The reader's perspective is of the trio from behind as they arrive at the bottom of the pier's dock. A ladder is positioned there. Brighello reaches for the ladder to pull himself out of the water.

PAGE 10

PANEL 1 - MEDIUM SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

Brighello is mostly center, pulling himself onto the floor of the pier. Something to the right and off-frame catches his eye.

OLD FISHERMAN

(off-frame)

Oh, ho, ho!

BRIGHELLO:

!

PANEL 2 - LONG SHOT OF THE OLD FISHERMAN

The old man is tying up his boat to the pier. He's looking towards the reader at Brighello with a sort of amused surprise.

OLD FISHERMAN

Well, now, it's been a while since I seen someone swimming into Olorea! What happened to your boat? Did you not have one?

PANEL 3 - MEDIUM SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

Brighello, dripping wet, is talking to the fisherman. The fisherman's back is to the reader as he speaks to Brighello, but he has an amused smile from what little the reader can see. Behind Brighello Becka and Maggie are raising out of the water in their bubble.

BRIGHELLO

Hey, old man. Can you tell me if there's a competition happening soon?

OLD FISHERMAN

A competition? And you swam in? Well, sure, there's one tomorrow.

PANEL 4 - CLOSE UP SHOT OF A TAVERN SIGN

The sign is a wood sign on metal arms attached to the stone wall of the tavern. It has the words on it, "The Wistful Tavern"

CAPTION

You can sign up at The Wistful Tavern just up the road...

PAGE 11

PANEL 1 - MEDIUM SHOT OF THE TAVERNS INTERIOR

Brighello, Becka and Maggie enter the door.

PANEL 2 - MEDIUM SHOT OF A TAVERN MAID

The tavern maid is approaching the trio. She has a friendly smile on her face. Behind her the tavern is bustling, filled with people eating, drinking, laughing and telling stories. It's somewhat symbolic that the maid stands between the trio and all this friendly atmosphere.

MAID

Welcome to The Wistful Tavern! Are you competing? We have great deals for highly ranked competitors!

PANEL 3 - TWO SHOT OF BRIGHELLO AND TAVERN MAID

Brighello is showing a badge indicating ranking of his team. It doesn't give him any great pleasure to do this, since he knows what the reaction will be. The tavern maid has a surprised look on her face.

MAID

Oh! Uh... well, we don't often get.. uh... ranks at that level, but I can offer you a 10% discount on drinks...

PANEL 4 - MEDIUM SHOT OF BRIGHELLO, BECKA AND MAGGIE

Brighello, Becka and Maggie go to sit at a table, with Brighello on one end and Maggie on the the other end. Becka is between them and none of them look very happy.

PANEL 5 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

Something off-frame catches Brighello's eye.

PANEL 6 - GROUP SHOT OF TEAM RAVENWALD (MEZATINA, STONEWALL AND INTRUISTO)

Approaching from the other side of the table are Mezatina, Stonewall and Intruisto, the opposites of Brighello, Becka and Maggie, respectively. Mezatina is decked out in a leather overcoat with pockets all over. She also has several satchels strapped on her for tools and weapons. Stonewall looks somewhat similar to a conventional knight. He has a humorless look on his face. Intruisto, the teams mage, looks like a taller, male version of Maggie, but with more objects and representations of his trade, evidence of a longer career.

Mezatina has a gloating look on her face as she looks at Brighello.

MEZATINA

Wooo! Look at what just dragged itself into port! What did you do, swim in?

PANEL 7 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

Brighello is glowering back.

PAGE 12

PANEL 1 - MEDIUM SHOT OF INTRUISTO AND MAGGIE

Time has passed. The various team members have paired off and are in different parts of the tavern. Intruiisto and Maggie are talking very pleasantly at a table at one end of the tavern

CAPTION

Later...

INTRUISTO

...well, you never know! The student defeats the master eventually!

MAGGIE

Eek! Don't say that! You mentored me! I'll never be better than you!

INTRUISTO

I'm shocked that you would say that! Don't limit yourself!

PANEL 2 - MEDIUM SHOT OF STONEWALL AND BECKA

Stonewall and Becka are talking casually at the bar as they drink.

STONEWALL

...yeah, the fishing around here is great, but you have to be careful. If you're in a boat and it goes up the side of the water wall, you'll tip over. The boat'll fall right on top of you.

BECKA

That's some dumb, right there. Why don't they do something to fix that?

STONEWALL:

I dunno..

PANEL 3 - LONG SHOT OF BRIGHELLO AND MEZATINA

Mezatina and Brighello are at the table where the two teams encountered each other. They appear to be in a staring contest. Mezatina is smiling while Brighello glowers.

PANEL 4 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF MEZATINA

She is taunting Brighello gleefully.

MEZATINA

You know, it must feel terrible to try so hard and fail so completely. I almost feel bad for you.

MEZATINA

Almost.

PANEL 5 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

Brighello is beside himself with anger and can't help answering her taunts.

BRIGHELLO

You won because of a fluke.

PANEL 6 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF MEZATINA

Mezatina smiles a taunting at Brighello.

MEZATINA

We won because you picked a fight against a stronger team.

PAGE 13

PANEL 1 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

Brighello is just getting angrier. He slams his fist on the table.

SFX

WHAM!

BRIGHELLO

You won because you got lucky! We're the whole reason you're here! Your ranking went up on our backs!

PANEL 2 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF MEZATINA

Mezatina is still amused by all of this.

MEZATINA

So? That's the way the game is played. You challenged us, remember? Besides, what do you plan to do about it? You can't compete here. Your ranking is too low!

PANEL 3 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

Brighello leans over the table towards Mezatina, not really impressing her with his angry face.

BRIGHELLO

Actually, we can! We're going to invoke the Ranking Rule and use our rank as collateral!

PANEL 4 - LONG SHOT OF BRIGHELLO AND MEZATINA

For once Mezatina doesn't have a smile on her face. In fact, she's a little dumbfounded. Brighello is still standing and leaning over, but her surprised expression isn't changing his opinion much.

MEZATINA

Uh...

PAGE 14

PANEL 1 - LONG SHOT OF BRIGHELLO AND MEZATINA

Mezatina actually has a concerned look on her face. Brighello is sitting again, but still angry.

MEZATINA

...that means if you lose, you'll go back down to zero-

PANEL 2 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

He sees her hesitation and smirks as if he's already won.

BRIGHELLO

We won't.

PANEL 3 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF MEZATINA

Mezatina is getting worried, now.

MEZATINA

...this could be a really bad ide-

PANEL 4 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

He sees her hesitation and smiles triumphantly.

BRIGHELLO

It isn't.

PANEL 5 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF MEZATINA

Mezatina is just shocked at this point.

MEZATINA

You can't beat us.

PANEL 6 - CLOSEUP OF BRIGHELLO AND MEZATINA

Brighello leans in again, determined. Mezatina isn't scared of him, but very surprised and confused.

BRIGHELLO

(large text)

Yes. We. Will.

PAGE 15

PANEL 1 - MEDIUM LONG SHOT OF THE OUTSIDE OF AN OUTDOOR ARENA

The outer walls of the outdoor arena are oddly shaped for reasons that will become apparent with a view from the inside. Suffice it to say, the walls are not straight, but a conglomeration of large spherical structures with entrance arcs in between. In front of the main entrance is a sign that says "Competition Today"

PANEL 2 - ESTABLISHING SHOT OF THE INTERIOR OF THE ARENA

The arena as a whole is an oval shape. Due to the types of battles that take place in the arena, the spectators have to be shielded for their protection. This is done by making the spectator area a crowded collection of open-mouthed heads and skulls of a variety of species. The mouths, eyes and nostrils are openings through which the spectators watch.

At one end of the arena is a large mouth with a tongue sticking straight out. It is here that the fighting commentator stands to provide running commentary on the events to the crowd.

The arena itself is packed sand with large sculptures of stone fingers poking up through the ground, acting as great pillars that are scattered throughout the arena.

ANNOUNCER

(yelling text)

Ladies and Gentlemen! Welcome to the competition! The teams are ready and the arena is ready!

ANNOUNCER

Are

ANNOUNCER

You

ANNOUNCER

Ready?

SFX

(Audience)

RAAAAAAAH!

PAGE 16

PANEL 1 - GROUP SHOT OF TEAM RAVENWALD

They're at one side of the arena, waiting to be announced. Mezatina seems a little concerned, while Stonewall is serious while Intruisto is calm.

ANNOUNCER

(yelling text, off-panel)

Our first team is Team Ravenwald! This is their debut appearance at the at the arena! They come with five-fight win streak and are looking to up their ranking with another victory!

PANEL 2 - GROUP SHOT OF TEAM HAMMERHOUSE (BRIGHELLO, BECKA, MAGGIE)

Team Hammerhouse is at the other side of the arena. Brighello is determined while Becka and Maggie are unhappy with their lot.

ANNOUNCER

(yelling text, off-panel)

Their opponents are Team Hammerhouse! And boy, do we have a treat for you! Team Hammerhouse was the last team beaten by Team Ravenwald! They're looking for revenge folks! They want it so bad they've invoked the Ranking Rule to gain entry into the competition! Will they succeed? Everything's on the line!

PANEL 3 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF BRIGHELLO

He's chomping at the bit to get even

PANEL 4 - PANEL-WITHIN-PANEL: INNER PANEL CLOSEUP SHOT OF ANNOUNCER, OUTER PANEL GROUP SHOT OF TEAM RAVENWALD

Team Ravenwald is ready to go. There's just one last ritual they have to deal with and that's being asked if they are ready (as if such a question was needed).

ANNOUNCER

(yelling text)

Team Ravenwald! Are you ready?

MEZATINA, STONEWALL, INTRUISTO

(yelling as one)

YES

PANEL 5 - PANEL-WITHIN-PANEL: INNER PANEL CLOSEUP SHOT OF ANNOUNCER, OUTER PANEL GROUP SHOT OF TEAM HAMMERHOUSE

Brighello is ready to go, but Becka and Maggie have very dissatisfied looks on their faces

ANNOUNCER

(yelling text)

Team Hammerhouse! Are you ready?

BRIGHELLO

(yelling text)

YES!

BECKA

(regular text)

Yeah...

MAGGIE

....

PAGE 17

PANEL 1 - LONG SHOT OF A BIRD FLYING OVERHEAD

Quietly unseen, a bird flies to the top of one of the finger columns in the arena

PANEL 2 - CLOSEUP SHOT OF THE BIRD

The bird is actually the owl, staring down at the arena.

PANEL 3 - PANEL-WITHIN-PANEL: INNER PANEL CLOSEUP SHOT OF ANNOUNCER, OUTER PANEL GROUP SHOT OF BOTH TEAMS HEADING TOWARDS EACH OTHER

This is more of an abstract conceptual layout to indicate the impending battle. Team HammerHouse are on the left side of the panel heading towards the center and Team Ravenwald is on the right. Brighello is gritting his teeth, determined while Becka and Maggie are clearly worried. Stonewall and Intruisto are serious while Mezatina is grinning.

ANNOUNCER

(yelling text)

FIGHT!

PAGE 18

PANEL 1 - OVER THE SHOULDER SHOT OF MAGGIE FACING INTRUISTO

Maggie, with her back to the reader, is firing lightning at Intruisto, who is blocking with a magic shield.

SFX

(lightning)

KRA-KOW!

SFX

(shield)

Szzvvvapp!

ANNOUNCER

(off-panel)

Wow! We're off to a great start! The two mages are already facing off with a magic assault!

PANEL 2 - LONG SHOT OF BECKA

Becka, facing the viewer, fires missiles from panels in her armor at Stonewall, who is somewhere off-frame.

SFX

(missiles, repeat as necessary)

SHHHVOOOM

ANNOUNCER

(off-panel)

Ranged weapons! Everyone in the west-side seats, look out!

PANEL 3 - LONG SHOT OF THE WEST-SIDE STADIUM SPECTATOR AREA

Some of the missiles fly past their mark and head straight into the spectator area, exploding the various skull and head structures that protect the spectators.

SFX

(missiles)

SSSHHHHKROOOM!

SFX

(spectator voices)

AAAAUUUGH!

ANNOUNCER

Ouch! Some of our guests are going to be taking some sick days after that one!

PANEL 4 - MEDIUM LONG SHOT OF STONEWALL

Stonewall evades the remaining missiles by jumping behind one of the pillars. The missiles hit the ground and the pillar, blowing everything apart and shattering some of the pillars.

SFX

WHRKOOOM!

STONEWALL

Hmph!

SFX

WHRKOOOM!

ANNOUNCER

(yelling, off-panel)

Great evasion! The soldier is playing the outside game. The question is, can he last until she's out of ammo?

PANEL 5 - WIDE SHOT OF MEZATINA BEING CHASED BY BRIGHELLO

Brighello can move at super speeds, but only in straight lines. His suit projects a line at a target and propels him toward it. Unfortunately, Mezatina is teleporting from spot to spot as Brighello chases after her. Even at high speed, he can't catch her.

MEZATINA

Run, baby, run! Can't catch me!

BRIGHELLO

rrRRAAAUUGHH!

SFX

(teleporting sound)

Vzzzt!

SFX

(teleporting sound)

Vzzzt!

SFX

(teleporting sound)

Vzzzt!

PAGE 19

PANEL 1 - MEDIUM LONG SHOT OF BECKA

Becka is out of missiles. She's taken a large broken piece of one of the pillars and is preparing to throw it.

BECKA

Hrrghh...

ANNOUNCER

Team Hammerhouse's heavy has spent all her ammo! She's looking to improvise with the debris!

PANEL 2 - MEDIUM LONG SHOT OF STONEWALL

Stonewall just barely evades towards as the column crashes behind him.

BECKA

(off-panel)

-ggrah!

STONEWALL

Hmph!

SFX

SKRAASHH!

ANNOUNCER

Oo! He evades another close call!

PANEL 3 - MEDIUM SHOT OF MAGGIE

Maggie casts a spell into the ground, sending energy straight into it.

SFX

Vsszh!

PANEL 4 - MEDIUM SHOT OF INTRUISTO

The ground under Intruiisto's feet suddenly rears up, encasing him to the ankles.

INTRUISTO

!

SFX

(ground)

rrRRrr

ANNOUNCER

Ravenwald's Mage is in trouble!

PAGE 20

PANEL 1 - MEDIUM SHOT OF STONEWALL AND BECKA

Stonewall has rushed towards Becka and strikes at her with a sword, but she blocks with one of her arms. The blade gets wedged into her armor.

STONEWALL

HA!

BECKA

!

SFX

kCHANG

ANNOUNCER

We don't need to worry about ranged weapons anymore, folks! The heavies are moving to hand-to-hand combat!

PANEL 2 - MEDIUM SHOT OF INTRUISTO

Intruisto casts some magic on the ground to free himself. The ground is pulling apart, freeing his legs, but he's unaware of a clump of ground rising behind him.

SFX

(blast)

svVAAP

SFX

(ground)

rrRRRrrrr

PANEL 3 - AS ABOVE

The clump of ground behind Intruisto suddenly encases him, catching him by surprise. Intruisto is the first to get beaten in the contest!

INTRUISTO

Ah!

ANNOUNCER

The mage has been captured! Team HammerHouse is in the lead 1 to 0!

PANEL 4 - MEDIUM SHOT OF STONEWALL AND BECKA

Stonewall takes advantage of his sword stuck in Becka's armor. Before she can react, he uses it as leverage to jump onto her back, pulling a backup

knife out as he does so.

STONEWALL

Ho!

BECKA

Oh, ff-

ANNOUNCER

Uh-oh! The HammerHouse heavy is in trouble!

PANEL 5 - AS ABOVE

Stonewall slams his knife into a power conduit in Becka's armor, sending a shock through the armor that electrocutes her as well.

SFX

(shock)

ssSSZAAP!

BECKA

AAAUGH!

PANEL 6 - AS ABOVE

With her armor shut down due to the power shock and Becka in no shape to continue, she basically collapses, trapped under the weight of her armor. Stonewall just looks on as a small amount of smoke emanates from her outer shell.

SFX

WRUNK

ANNOUNCER

Team HammerHouse loses their heavy! The score is tied 1-1!

PAGE 21

PANEL 1 - WIDE SHOT OF MEZATINA AND BRIGHELLO

Mezatina is still teleporting and taunting Brighello

BRIGHELLO

(yelling)

RRRRAAAUGH! STAY STILL!

MEZATINA

Haha! Why?

PANEL 2 - LONG SHOT OF THE OWL

Off in the distance the owl sits on a pillar, watching from above

PANEL 3 - CLOSEUP OF THE OWL'S FACE

The owl is framed center. Its black eyes look like there's a constellation of stars in them.

PANEL 4 - MEDIUM LONG ON MEZATINA

Mezatina teleports by one of the pillars. She's looking left at an off-frame Brighello heading towards here again.

MEZATINA

Haha!

PANEL 5 - CLOSEUP OF THE TOP OF A PILLAR ABOVE MEZATINA'S HEAD

Near the top of the pillar there is an explosive crack, separating the top of the pillar from the its form.

SFX

(crack)

KRRNCH

PANEL 6 - MEDIUM LONG ON MEZATINA

The top falls not far from Mezatina. Mezatina is startled, and that surprise is distracting her as the main pillar body inexplicably begins to over.

SFX

(nding)

WrnCH

MEZATINA

!

PANEL 7 - CLOSEUP ON MEZATINA'S FACE

Mezatina looks up as the falling pillar casts a shadow across her face.
She seems surprised.

PAGE 22

PANEL 1 - WIDE SHOT OF PILLAR HITTING THE GROUND

The pillar falls the ground, smashing to pieces and clouding the area with dust.

SFX

WHAM

PANEL 2 - WIDE SHOT OF MEZATINA AND BRIGHELLO, PULLING BACK FROM THE PREVIOUS PANEL

Not far away Brighello has Mezatina in his arms, having carried her away in the last moment before the crash

BRIGHELLO

Wow...

PANEL 3 - MEDIUM SHOT OF MEZATINA AND BRIGHELLO

Now facing the reader, both Brighello and Mezatina are both looking at the wreckage, while Mezatina is quietly reaching for something.

BRIGHELLO

Wow. You would have been crushed.

MEZATINA

Yeah...

PANEL 4 - AS ABOVE

Without warning, Mezatina zaps Brighello with a wand, shocking him in an electrocution style.

SFX

zZAP

BRIGHELLO

AAUUGH!

PANEL 5 - WORM'S EYE VIEW OF BRIGHELLO AND MEZATINA

Brighello falls to the ground while Mezatina stands over him with a smile on her face.

ANNOUNCER

The HammerHouse speedster is down! Team Ravenwald wins by a score of 2 to 1! Congratulations to the victors!

MEZATINA

Sorry, baby. Love and war and all that.

PAGE 23

PANEL 1 - MEDIUM LONG SHOT

It's some time later. The viewer is facing Brighello, who is sitting on the sidewalk with his back to a building wall. He's facing the viewer, but staring off into space. Becka and Maggie are standing by the same wall, but a distance away, separating the two from Brighello. They're staring at him in frustration.

PANEL 2 - LONG SHOT, FACING 180 DEGREES AT THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STREET

Mezatina, Stonewall and Intruisto) are conversing amongst themselves, while Mezatina is looking in the direction of the reader, casting a sympathetic glance towards Brighello.

PAGE 24

PANEL 1 - WIDE SHOT WITH THE CHARACTERS IN PROFILE

Mezatina is crossing the street to Brighello. She and Brighello are foreground with Becka and Maggie standing in background behind him. Mezatina is carrying a box.

PANEL 2 - WIDE SHOT AS ABOVE.

Mezatina is now crouching by Brighello, offering the box and saying something to him.

MEZATINA

Hey. Thanks for saving me back there. Look, this is an Endless Box. We filled it up with a bunch of stuff that you can sell off. After that you can sell the box. It should hold you out for a while.

PANEL 3 - AS ABOVE

The box is in Brighello's lap. Mezatina gives Brighello a kiss on the cheek. So far he's unresponsive.

SFX

(kiss)

smek

MEZATINA

You guys'll be back on your feet. Don't worry.

PANEL 4 - AS ABOVE

Mezatina is walking away, she is between frame center and frame right while the others maintain their positions. Brighello hasn't moved at all for the whole moment.

PANEL 5 - AS ABOVE

Maggie takes the box from Brighello's lap.

PANEL 6 - AS ABOVE

Maggie puts the box in a storage container in Becka's armor.

PAGE 25

PANEL 1 - ANOTHER WIDE SHOT, IN PROFILE OF THE OLOREA PIER

Brighello walks from right to left along the pier while Becka and Maggie follow some distance behind.

PANEL 2 - LONG SHOT, FACING THE END OF THE PIER

Brighello just stands there, looking towards the viewer at the water. Becka and Maggie are still some distance behind.

PANEL 3 - CLOSEUP ON BRIGHELLO'S FACE

Brighello is emotionally devastated.

PANEL 4 - LONG SHOT, FACING THE END OF THE PIER

Brighello dives into the water from the end of the pier. Becka and Maggie are standing behind him.

PANEL 5 - WIDE SHOT IN PROFILE OF THE OLOREA PIER

Becka and Maggie look at each other.

PANEL 6 - AS ABOVE

Becka and Maggie levitate up in a bubble conjured by Maggie

PAGE 26

FULL PAGE SPREAD - WIDE SHOT FROM THE END OF THE PIER, LOOKING OUT INTO THE WATER.

Brighello is off in the distance, moving away from the viewer letting the water take him back to the stop from which he arrived. Becka and Maggie follow him up the wall in their bubble.





Script Postmortem

The following section is a breakdown of my thoughts and workflow as I wrote the script. Unfortunately, there is no standard format for a comic book script and therefore no standard approach to writing one in general. For this project, I adopted various ideas from screenplay writing and made modifications to suit my particular needs.

Unfortunately, the script itself turned out longer than I was aiming for. One of the reasons this publication is called "The Unfinished Comic Book Project" is because I knew I'd never have time to get all the artwork done before the year was out.

Still, the work that was ultimately done might be informative to others. I hope readers can take some useful ideas from what ultimately became, ultimately, a creative exercise.

ACTION FIRST, DIALOGUE LATER

Alfred Hitchcock began his filmmaking life during the era of silent films. In Truffaut's book "Hitchcock", and in the documentary "Hitchcock/Truffaut", Hitchcock shows how important this was for the creation of visual storytelling. Hitchcock's assertion was that the craft of storytelling took a hit when actors became able to speak. Rather than tell a story in visual terms, the filmmakers began to rely on dialogue. Having begun in the silent film era, Hitchcock believed strongly that this was the wrong approach; that spoken words were used only when there was no other way to express the situation.

Armed with this idea, I tried to tell as much of the story as possible through action, leaving bits of descriptive text to illustrate what the characters might verbalize if necessary. It's worth noting I don't always subscribe to this idea. A story can be very heavy on exposition or dialogue and still be successful. The Prince Valiant comic strips are a good example of this. There is no dialogue at all in those stories and everything is either art or exposition.

That said, for this particular project I thought the Hitchcock method would be a good way to go. Readers can see an example of this on the next page. What is shown are a series of beats for the story. If I had to do it over again, however, I don't think I would have started with the idea of beats so much as a series of descriptions of major moments. Then I might break that down into smaller moments and work from there into beats. One of the problems of heading straight into beats was that I was forced to think in detail right away without knowing how it would all fit together in advance. A lot of writers work this way, but for me it meant a lot of rereading previously-written material and stopping to wonder if everything was coming together correctly. I feel as if thinking on a more abstract level first would have been helpful to provide a clearer sense of direction.

One of the interesting side effects of the action-first method, however, is that I didn't always worry so much about dialogue. All the confusion and rework that occurred with the raw action didn't happen with the dialogue because I had already mapped out what the characters needed to say, if they needed to say anything at all. The most difficult moments in the dialogue actually came while the announcer was calling out moves in the competition. This was because, ultimately, his presence wasn't completely necessary. I had only included his statements to explain why he was still there and provide a cue that the battle between Brighello and Mezatina was different than the other competitors. If I had to do it again, I think I would find a way to write him out of the story.

- o Scenes

- 1.0 Forest Path

- 1.1 Brigello, Big Red and Maggie are walking down a forest path. Brigello is in the lead with Big Red and Maggie trailing behind.
- 1.2 Big Red and Maggie are visibly concerned about Brigello. Brigello is walking with an angry look on his face. He's ignoring them completely as he walks down the path.
- 1.3 As Big Red and Maggie discuss what to do amongst themselves, Brigello finally stops and points. Not far away is a large pond.
- 1.4 Big Red and Maggie are visibly confused. Brigello pulls out a map, showing a path to a location called Olorea.
- 1.5 Big Red and Maggie are shocked and immediately protest. Brigello argues back.
- 1.6 Big Red makes a valid point. Brigello is angered and throws a rock at her.
- 1.7 Brigello yells at the duo and then points to the pond. He jumps in.
- 1.8 Big Red and Maggie look at each other. Neither want to go, but they don't want to abandon Brigello, either.
- 1.9 Maggie generates a bubble for her and Big Red and the two levitate into the pond.

- 2.0 Water Route to Olorea

- 2.1 Brigello is ahead of the other two, swimming with focus through the water.
- 2.2 Suddenly, Brigello loses control as a current catches him, pulling him at high speed.
- 2.3 Big Red and Maggie give chase, but are pulled along as well.
- 2.4 The trio hurtles towards a distant light as air bubbles erupt from Brigello's mouth.

- 3.0 Outer Water Wall Surrounding Olorea

- 3.1 Brigello's head bursts over the "top" of the water. Maggie and Big Red follow after in

THE BEATS OF THE SCRIPT

For a long time I was generally disdainful of the modern comic book script. I felt a script shouldn't be written as a series of panels and pages. That seemed to be something the artist should decide. That said, as project wore on, I began to rethink my position.

I realized if every panel is considered a "beat", or discrete moment of importance, then a script can establish the rhythm and speed of a story. This can be extended to pages, which would be super-beats, encapsulating a set of individual beats. Naturally a whole issue is an even larger collection and a story arc of multiple issues would be the largest.

This is also useful for planning out a script. If a script were to be, say, five pages or so, one could plan out starting from the page down to the panel before writing the story in full. In the early days of comics, pages had a general number of about 6 panels per page. I admit I could be wrong here, but that is my recollection, at least. In any event, this is a useful starting point if a writer isn't sure what to do. Future revisions of the script can then add or remove panels and pages as necessary.

Unfortunately, much of this came to me far too late. I had hit on the idea of beats in general, but started with a series of beats themselves instead of pre-planning the length of the comic book. As a result what was intended to be a very short story ended up being approximately the same length as a standard comic book issue, which usually runs about 20 to 24 pages. In retrospect, the better idea would have been to start with the number of pages and panels. From there adjustments could be made to fit the story. As it was, I simply started with the first beat and worked until I finished. It was only then I realized I had overshot my mark.

The script excerpt on the opposite page shows the first pass of the work. Ironically, I made the same error I mentioned in the first paragraph; by including camera shots and angles, I was explicitly dictating the art instead of leaving it to the artist to decide. In this case, however, I was going to be the artist, so I suppose this was a little forgivable.

Panel

Establishing shot of forest. In the center of the frame, far away but visible against the trees is a bird looking into the forest.

Panel

Closeup of the bird. It's an owl, but the eyes are strange. Rather than regular eyes, there are two deep black orbs that almost appear to have little stars shining inside them.

Panel

Something catches the owl's attention. Its head snaps toward the source quickly.

Panel

Medium shot. The owl launches off the branch and heads toward an unknown target

Panel

Establishing shot. A forest path. There are three people walking along the path, but one is much further ahead, walking towards the left of the panel, while the other two are closer to the right side, walking alongside each other.

Panel

Medium long shot of the two trailing behind. It is Becka and Maggie. They're looking with concern at the third person (off-panel, slightly to the left) and speaking to each other.

Panel

Closeup of the third person, viewing from the right, so that the person, Brighello, is slightly angled to the left. He's looking at a map with an intense, angry focus.

Panel

Two shot of the Becka and Maggie discussing what to do with Brighello. They're confused as to why he's leading them down this path.

WRITING STAGES

If I were to do things over, I think I would spend more time breaking down the process into various stages. The first stage would necessarily be the ideation stage. Much of this was covered in the previous sections.

Symbolism

The second stage would probably be a symbolism stage. I view symbols very mechanically, which is probably a fault. Nevertheless, I break symbols down into various categories.

The first category would be the persistent symbol, something that exists over the length of the story. These generally highlight the theme or main point of the story and either don't change for the story's lifetime or only change near the story's end due to some event. A good example of this would be the use of eyes in the original *Blade Runner*. The metaphor of eyes as the windows into a soul was adapted to indicate natural versus artificial humans.

The second category would be the transitory symbol. This highlights a momentary issue taking place within one scene or a short series of scenes. An example can be found in the film *Forces of Nature*, where the weather mirrored the circumstances the main characters found themselves in. Of course, since this happened throughout the film, one could argue the weather was a persistent symbol, but I think the point still stands.

A symbol can be personal; an object that is carried around or is intimately associated with something. In this case it represents some internal state of the character and may, under the right circumstances, change or be replaced. Think of the glass unicorn in the play *The Glass Menagerie*.

The symbol can also be external. In this case, the symbol represents the relationship of one or more characters to the world beyond. In the film *It*, the main characters are consistently threatened when in the dark or in enclosed areas or both. This was a statement on the relationship of the children to *It*, the creature that was hunting them.

Beats and Pages

Following the overall flow of action and the definition of symbols, I think I would have been ready to work out the actual beats of the story as described earlier. Pre-dialogue notes, panels and pages would be broken down as described earlier. The important issue is making sure the last panel or two on one page provides a hook to lure readers to the next page. Obviously, if this were part of an ongoing series, the last page or two would have to provide a hook to encourage the reader to see the next issue in the series.

Dialogue

Once the pages have been broken down, the dialogue can be added in. One of the interesting things about comics is how far it can travel along the spectrum between pure literature and pure visuals. Because of this, a comic book can be all narration and exposition, or all imagery. It's important to again reiterate that the process described so far is just one of many.

With all of that done, the rest comes down to editing, revisions and polish.

Panel

Closeup Shot: Brighello.

Brighello is beside himself with anger and can't help answering her taunts

Brighello: You won because of a fluke.

Panel

Closeup Shot: Mezatina

Mezatina smiles at Brighello

Mezatina: We won because you picked a fight against a stronger team.

Panel

Closeup Shot: Brighello

Brighello is just getting angrier

Brighello: You won because you got lucky! We're the whole reason you're here! Your ranking went up on our backs!

Panel

Closeup Shot: Mezatina

Mezatina is still amused by all of this.

Mezatina: So? That's the way the game is played. You challenged us, remember? Besides, what do you plan to do about it? You can't compete here. Your ranking is too low!

Panel

Closeup Shot: Brighello

Brighello leans over the table towards Mezatina

Brighello: Actually, we can compete here! We're going to invoke the Ranking Rule and use our rank as collateral!

Panel

Long Shot: Mezatina and Brighello

For once Mezatina doesn't have a smile on her face. In fact, she's a little dumbfounded.

THEMES AND DYNAMICS

For this script I had picked the concept of revenge. It really didn't end up that way; the script was finally more of a study of hubris. Still, it's important to start from somewhere. Originally, I was going to try for all the characters to more or less have their own sub-arc within the main story. After I began writing, however, I saw that really most of the characters were something of a chorus to the character of Brighello.

Brighello's character is contrasted in some way by every character in the story. He is isolated and critiqued by his teammates, even as he shows his ability to get them to do what he wants. In addition, his failure doesn't just bring ruin upon himself, but also drags his teammates down with him.

Brighello's main opposition is Mezatina, who exists of an inversion of Brighello and his team both in gender and success, Brighello's team is one male and two females while Mezatina's team is one female and two males. Brighello is at the beginning of a losing streak, while Mezatina is reaping the rewards of a winning streak.

I also wanted to show a contrast in relationships. Brighello and Mezatina are locked in a deep rivalry, but I try to show that the other teammates of both sides operate on some level between friendship and professional courtesy. Maggie has a teacher/student relationship with Intruisto and Becka is comfortable enough with Stonewall to sit and drink with him. The only point of true antagonism is between Brighello and Mezatina, the two leaders of their respective teams.

What turned the story from a revenge story to a hubris story was the setting and the ending. I'm not sure why I chose a world in sport-like competition, but it lightened the mood up enough that a victorious revenge story didn't feel like it was going to work. Deciding that Brighello would fail was more interesting. That meant, however, that he had to be set up to fail, which caused everything else to come together.

WORLD BUILDING

Coming up with a backstory isn't all that unusual, but when I figured out the setting, I managed to pull together some ideas that had been floating around in my mind prior to writing the script. Needless to say, most of the ideas aren't apparent in the script and probably don't need to be. The whole exercise was really to have something to work with.

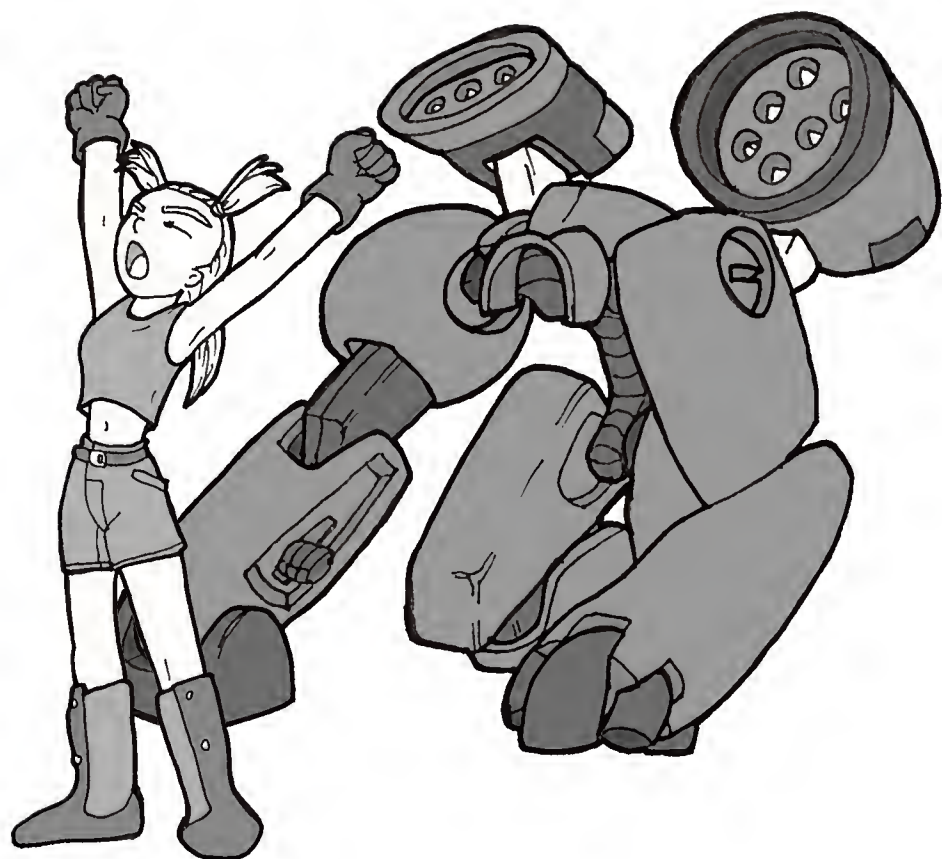
It had occurred to me a some months prior that there are a lot of stories on multiple realities, but not very many that discuss a multiple reality ecosystem. Everything that exists in our actual universe interacts with everything else in some way, so it seemed to me that multiple realities would interact as well. I came up with the idea that this particular reality was a kind of "feeder" universe. That is, realities in general "shed" energy or bits of themselves that are then absorbed by other realities. Some do so more than others and thereby "feed" valuable resources in the form of energy, clumps of alternative physical laws or other tangible elements into the surrounding realities.

With that in mind, I imagined the universe of this story to be one that involved constant competition. The competitors generally used reality-bending powers that caused various reactions on a multi-universal level. This basically justified the general behaviors in the story even if nothing was completely explained.

As for the characters, I imagined them as part of a ranking system where the higher a player is ranked, the more perks are acquired (free items, heavy discounts, access to areas not otherwise available and so forth). Players of a low rank had very few resources. As a player rose through the ranks, more resources would become available. This is why Becka is described as having an exoskeleton that appears assembled in an ad-hoc manner. As she developed through the ranks, she would have assembled her armor piece by piece. This also explains why Maggie does not have as many items of use as her mentor, Intruisto.

Brighello, as opposed to all others in the story, is described as having acquired his suit outside the usual process. I didn't consider the exact circumstances of this because it didn't matter to me, but it did feed into the idea that he was able to accelerate through the ranks faster than if he had to cobble together his tools over time like the others. This is part of the change from a revenge story to a hubris story. It made sense that if Brighello was comfortable in his advantage, his ego would be hurt at his first significant loss. This helped things come together.

A quick note should be made about the owl. After finishing the script, I realized it wasn't a very interesting story. On a whim I decided to add the owl as a mysterious instigator of events. I wish I could say there was some huge and fascinating backstory to that owl, but in reality it was just a device to keep things ambiguous and interesting.



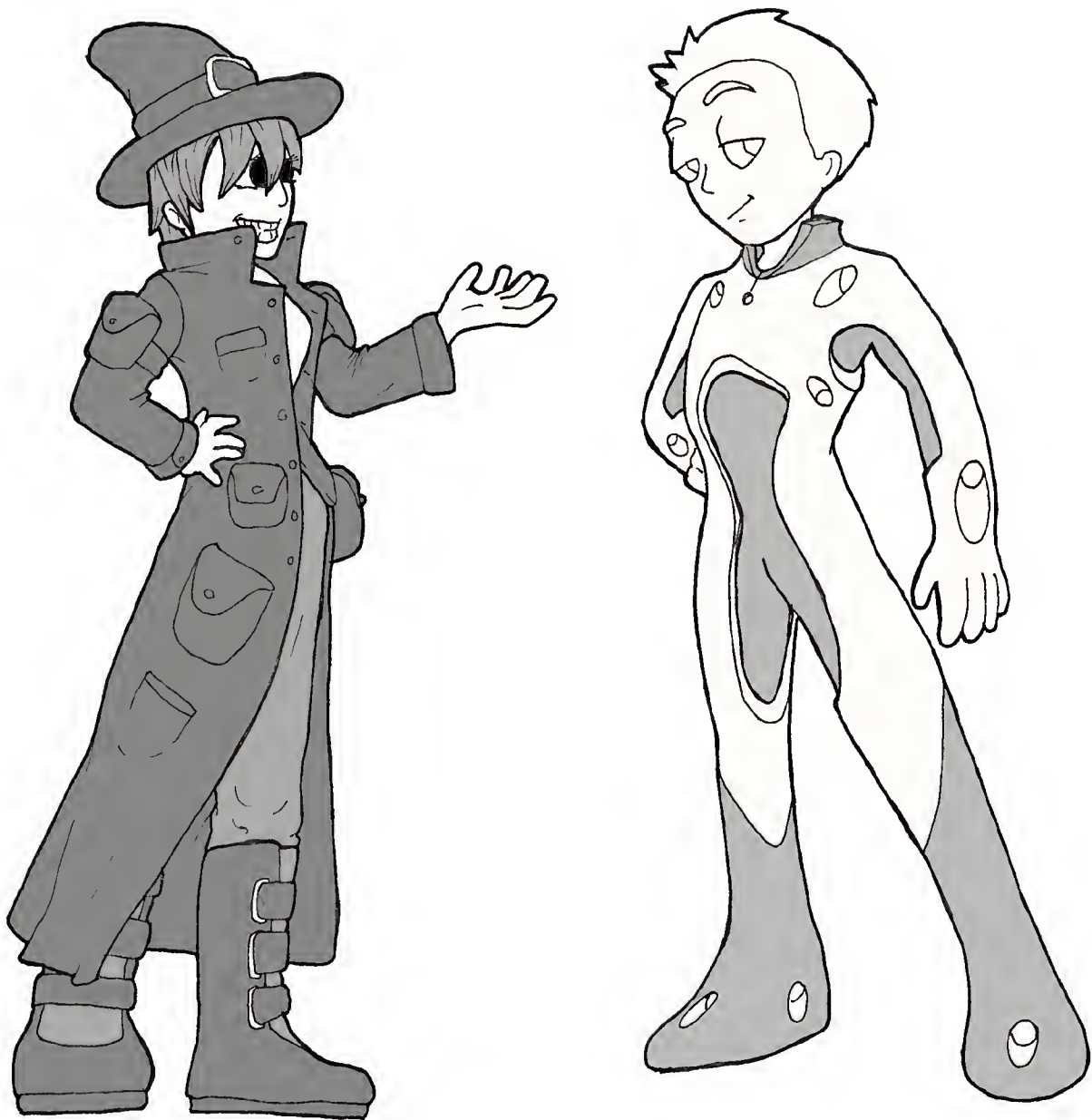


Concept Sketches

For this particular script, I decided on a more cartoonish art style. I reasoned that the simpler designs would increase turnaround time and I felt it would make the story more approachable in general. Unfortunately, I completed the script too late in the year to finish the artwork in time. A contributing factor was the fact that I had to try and develop a more cartoon-like style. For years prior I had been focusing on a more realistic style. This made going to a more cartoon-oriented style a bit of a conceptual leap.

A final issue was to find the right coloring tools for the project. I favored acrylic painting, but I also preferred a glazing technique which required layers of transparent color be placed upon each other. This meant increased time waiting for the paint to dry. Because of this I started looking at watercolors and watercolor pencils in particular. I had avoided colored pencils for years since I preferred a smooth-blended look and pencils tend to be granular in their blending. The learning curve was fairly significant and as the final days of the project approached, I realized I just wouldn't have time to finish all the artwork.

Since the comic itself is not going to get finished, here are some of the prototype concept sketches that I was working on while I tried to flesh out the characters in my mind.

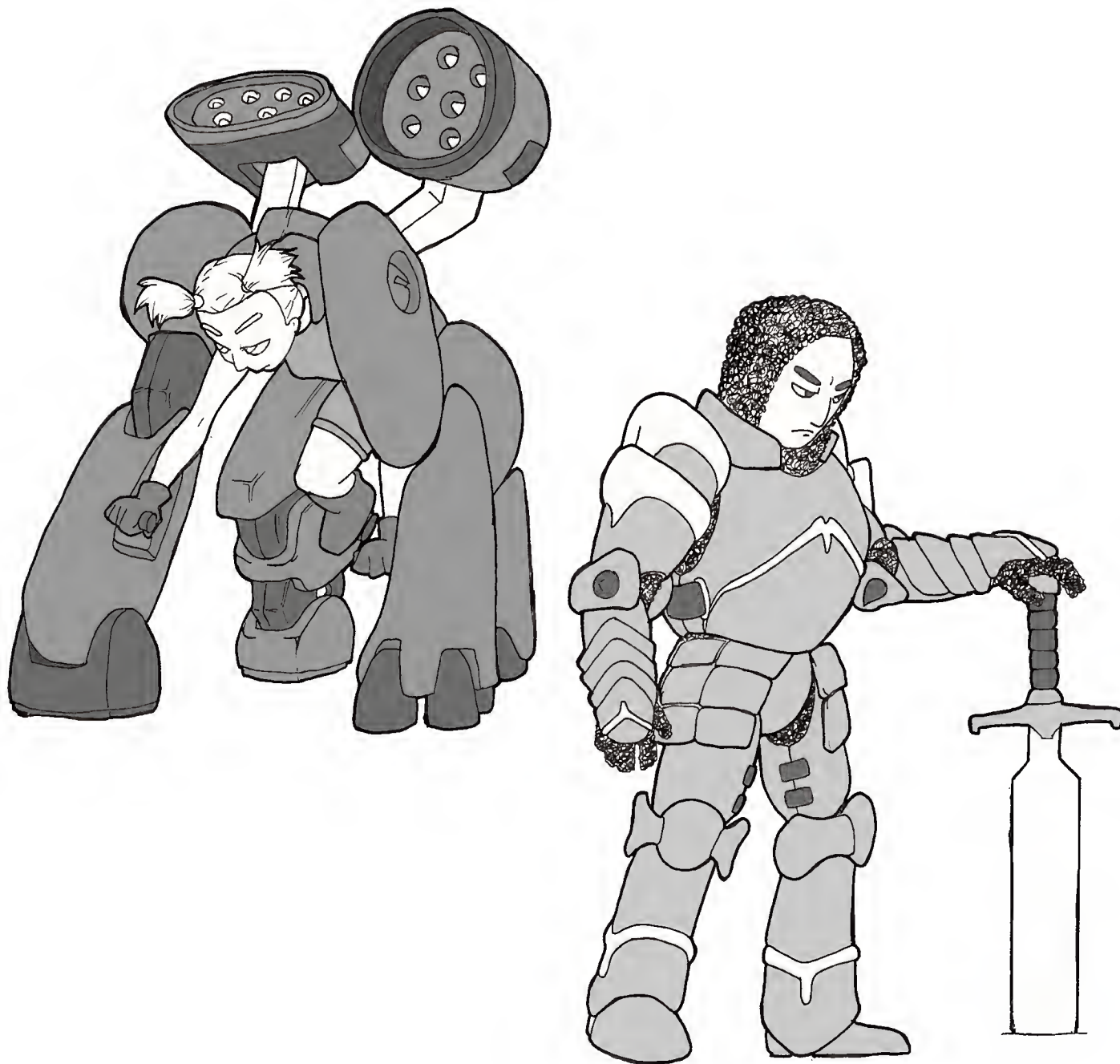


Brighello and Mezatina

Brighello's name comes from the Commedia del'Arte tradition where there is a character called Brighella, a sort of aggressive comic character representing things like lust, greed and so forth. Mezatina's name comes from the Commedia del'Arte tradition as well. In her case, her prototype was Mezzetino, another comic character with a little more class and artistry.

Brighello's outfit is a suit that enables speedy movement by projecting a line to his desired location. The suit enables him to follow the line and high speed, enabling him to reach locations before anyone can react. This made him ideal for advance movements against opposing teams.

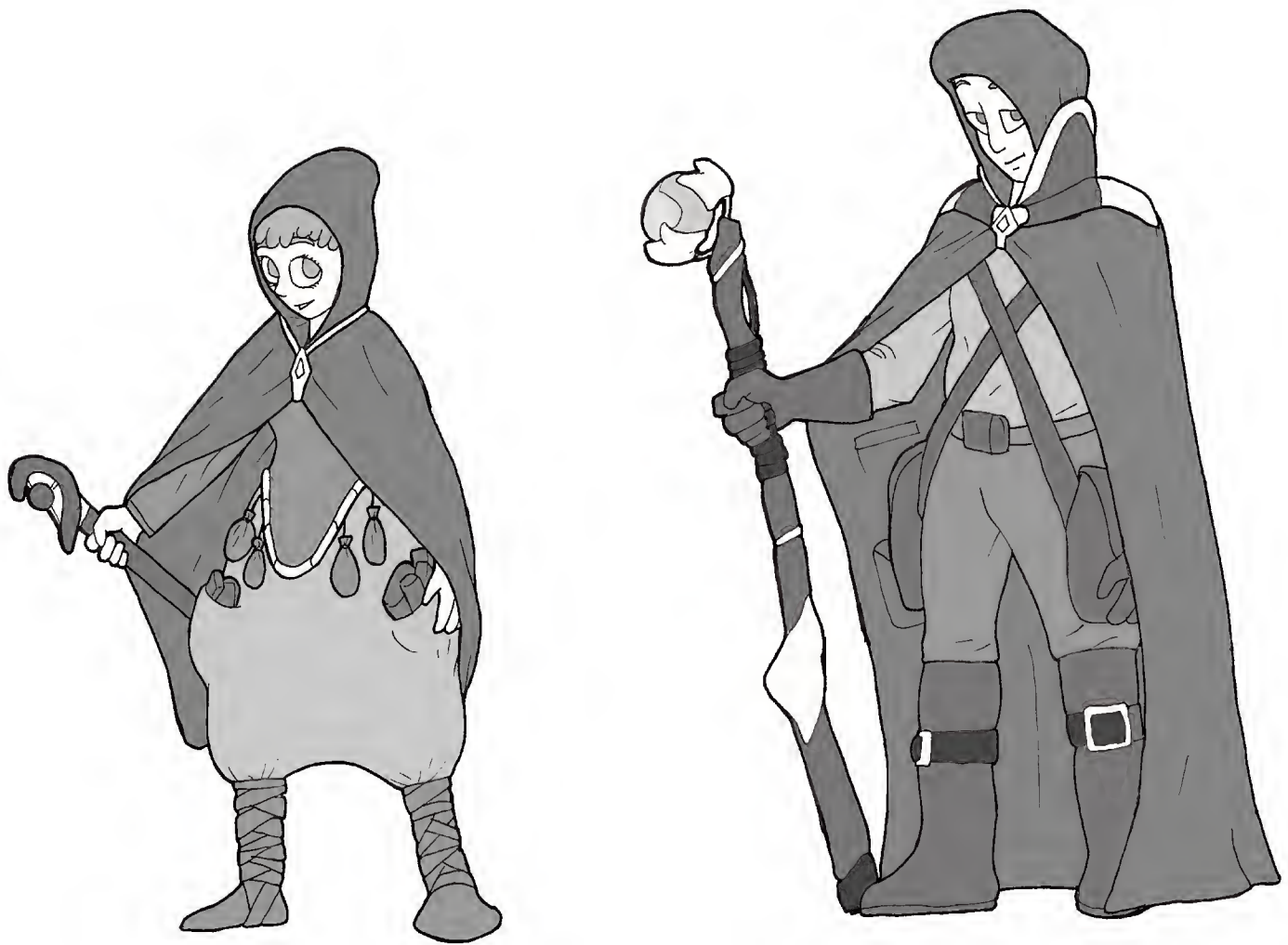
Mezatina is also a prime choice for advance actions. She is a teleporter, although I didn't go into detail on how. Her various bags and pouches hold all kinds of items that help her in performing her duties.



Becka and Stonewall

Becka and Stonewall are the heavyweights of their respective teams, being able to absorb and dish out a great deal of damage. Becka is such because of the powered exosuit she has built over time. Like many, she started out with a basic exoskeleton and, as time went on, added, upgraded or replaced parts as she was able to do so.

In contrast, Stonewall is simply a knight in armor, relying on his experience, instincts and physical robustness to carry the day. Where Becka is constantly tinkering with gadgetry, Stonewall relies on his training, skills and experience. This helps keep his equipment needs at a relatively simple level and it doesn't hurt him as much if his ranking falls. That said, he can find himself in situations where he is out-matched by superior firepower.



Maggie and Intruisto

Maggie and Intruisto carry more of an explicit relationship than the other characters as I went out of my way to imply that Intruisto is Maggie's mentor. Intruisto's name comes from the Esperanto word *Instruisto*, meaning "Instructor" or "teacher".

Being that both are spellcasters, I went for a somewhat fantasy look, complete with cape and cloak. The general differences in fashion speak to the relative level of mastery each character can claim. Initially, I wanted both their faces covered up to create a sense of mystery and mysticism, but ultimately it didn't feel the way to go. Personality-wise, I wanted to show these two as the most friendly and easy-going of either group. Hopefully, each set of characters show similar personality traits to mark them as reflections of each other (on some level).

